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TENNYSON
SELECTED POEMS

By

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His vast popularity in his own times. No other poet has, during his life time, enjoyed such vast popularity for such a long time as Tennyson. He was in touch with the general movement of thought of the age in which he lived, in politics, in science, in religion, and representative of it no less in his doubts than in his affirmations. He was fond of domestic themes; he was patriotic; he distrusted excess. For these reasons, amongst others, he was able to speak for the great, new middle class which had then come into prominence, and was acclaimed during his life-time as the national poet, in a sense in which no English poet had ever been since Shakespeare. A personal friend of the Queen, he was the first Englishman to be honoured with a peerage for his services to literature, and his death was more intimately felt by the British public than that of any other great

national figure since Nelson. He was the expositor of his age and his age gratefully found its reflection heightened and enriched in his verse. "Throughout the entire Victorian period, Tennyson stood at the summit of poetry in England. Not in vain was he appointed Laureate at the death of Wordsworth, in 1850; for, almost alone among those who have held the office, he felt the importance of his place and filled and honoured it. Tennyson was able to deal competently and even triumphantly with the demands for poems on royal births, marriages, and deaths, on battles, exhibitions, and jubilees, to which his Laureateship exposed him. The Laureateship may have been occupied by greater poets than Tennyson, but none of them discharged the office itself with more consistent success For nearly half a century Tennyson was not only a man and a poet; he was a voice the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their griefs and their triumphs. In the wonderful variety of his verse he suggests all the qualities of England's greatest poets. The dreaminess of Spenser, the majesty of Milton, the natural simplicity of Wordsworth, the fancy of Blake and Coleridge, the melody of Keats and Shelley, the narrative vigour of Scott and Byron,—all these striking qualities are evident on successive pages of Tennyson's poetry. The only thing lacking is the dramatic power of the Elizabethan age".

Poems of 1830 and 1833 volumes. In the first two volumes (1830 and 1833) of his poems, Tennyson's art is, at its best, already exquisite; but it is as yet uncertain and immature. Tennyson was always an unsparing critic of himself. He dealt with his work in those two volumes with a harshness he never afterwards showed. Of the total number of eighty-six pieces, he permanently rejected thirty two. A considerable number of others were under very extensive alteration Poems which were greatly altered and changed were *Oenone*, *The Palace of Art*, *A Dream of Fair Women*, *The Lady of Shalott*, and *The Miller's Daughter*. No small portion of the charm of all these poems is due to the alterations, additions and excisins.

Poems of the 1842 volume. The collection of pieces published by Tennyson in the 1842 volume shows the poet in the full command of his first style...In his own way he is experiencing the almost universal desire to go beyond the limits of self, and so he borrows his themes from the present, from the Middle Ages, from classical antiquity, from legend or fancy as well as from reality.

In these poems (1842), we find the continuation of many things seen first in the volume of 1832. The English idyllic strain, first heard in *The Miller's Daughter* and *The May Queen*, is sounded again in *The Gardener's Daughter* and *Dora* and *Audley Court*. Arthurian legend had already won the poet's attention in *The Lady of Shalott* : a serious study of it is indicated by *Sir Galahad*, *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*, and above all by *Morte d'Arthur*, perhaps Tennyson's greatest achievement in blank verse. The same volume contains also many things of which Tennyson had given no previous example. "Break, break, break", the most perfect and thoughtful of his songs hitherto published, is in this volume. There too is that marvellous classical idyll, *Ulysses*, and there are *Locksley Hall* and *The Two Voices* and *The Vision of Sin*. These poems undoubtedly embody a serious philosophy of life, and their author has to be regarded both as an artist and as an intellectual force.

Nearly all that Tennyson subsequently cared for is represented in the volume of 1842. Few poets have been more patriotic than he ; and we find the three grand political poems with their pride in England, scarcely equalled since Shakespeare. Social as well as political questions always filled Tennyson's mind ; and here we have *Locksley Hall*. He was interested in character ; and we have studies of moods of mind like *Ulysses* and *St. Simeon Stylites*. He was a student of the ultimate problems of religion and of ethics ; and we have *The Two Voices*, *The Vision of Sin*, and *The Palace of Art*. We have also, in a widely different strain, such gems as *St. Agnes' Eve* and *Sir Galahad*. Finally, he was always, as a poet ought to

be, a dreamer of dreams; and so we find in these volumes such a piece of pure fancy as *The Day Dream*.

Consistent development. Tennyson had a strikingly consistent development, a development from the purely artistic to the blend of thought with art. Tennyson was never of the school of Shelley. Shelley, he said, was often too much in the clouds for him; and there is very little of his work that has the ring of Shelley except perhaps *The Lover's Tale*. He did for a moment belong to the school of Byron, but the Byronic influence soon vanished. The poet who, among Tennyson's immediate predecessors, had by far the greatest influence over him, was Keats; and, next to Keats, perhaps, Coleridge. He put Keats on a lofty pinnacle; and there is something of the innermost soul of poetry in almost everything he ever wrote. The sensuousness of Keats attracted Tennyson. For no poet was more keenly alive than he to the importance of the sensuous element in verse, and none was more readily responsive to the suggestions of sense. This sensitiveness to impression, on which the style of Keats is based, was the quality which was earliest developed in Tennyson. It was because of this quality that Edward FitzGerald looked back upon the poems of 1842 and the earlier volumes as embodying the true and the great Tennyson. FitzGerald never fully approved of the later poems, partly because he thought that from *The Princess* onwards Tennyson tried to put too much thought into his verse and overloaded it with politics and social philosophy and theology, things good in themselves, but in FitzGerald's opinion detrimental to poetry. This other element too was in Tennyson from the start, but it grew in importance. It was Tennyson's ambition to become equal to the great sage poets, poets who are both great thinkers and great artists, like Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe.

Self-revelation. In *The Palace of Art* and *The Two Voices*, Tennyson exposes his own spiritual dilemma with wonderful frankness, but in both his solution is the one

which the public expected from him. He was not insincere in arriving at his conclusions; they were the answers he thought to be right. But deeper in him were feelings beyond the grasp of the conscious mind, and we are closer to these in *The Lady of Shalott* and *The Lotos-Eaters*, where the creative imagination is chiefly in control. There is thus much unintentional or unconscious self-revelation in Tennyson's work.

Sometimes the unintentional self-revelation takes a subtle form as in the *Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind*, written during the Cambridge period and published in 1830. It is one of the first examples in English literature of the dramatic monologue. The "Confessions" should not be regarded as Tennyson's own, but those of a character with a second-rate sensitive mind. This character is in a wretched condition, a mood of extreme depression like that in which *The Two Voices* begins. He seems to have lost his faith, his energy and his hope. He regrets having lost the traditional beliefs and yearns to recover them as providing a sense of security which he finds in other people. However, although this character thinks himself to be without faith, his belief in God is still perceptible. The monologue begins and ends as a prayer; it is specifically addressed to God. The confidence that there exists a supernatural being who has a special relationship with man is complete. So what the poem tells us about Tennyson is not that he was a secret disbeliever, but that his belief in God was so deep that when he tried to enter the mind of a man without belief, he could not do it.

However, the morbid condition of the "second-rate mind" has much in common with Tennyson's own condition. There is also in this poem a wish to evade the responsibilities of adult independence and to escape back into the world of childhood. Taking it with the other poems which concern a yearning for escape in some form, we cannot help seeing something of Tennyson's own character in the speaker. In *The Two Voices*, the good voice is made to have the upper

hand of the bad ; belief in life and purpose there triumphs over pessimism and depression. *In Memoriam* ultimately asserts hope and represents a victory over death and despair. After having written the *Supposed Confessions*, it was not till he wrote *Maud* (1856) that Tennyson again expressed a neurotic, black mind, without providing the opposed mood of hopefulness readily acceptable to his readers. In a whole series of poems, the 1842 volume presents subjects that deal in strength, goodness and belief in progress.

Tennyson's double nature does not divide itself between the poet and the man ; his poetry has a double nature and reveales not only itself but the poet. This is the truth that Hallam Tennyson confessed in his preface to the *Memoir* of his father's life : "......but besides the letters of my father and of his friends there are his poems, and in them we must look for the innermost sanctuary of his being. For my own part, I feel strongly that no biographer could so truly give him as he gives himself in his own works".

As a representative of his age. Tennyson is justly regarded as a representative poet of the Victorian Age. Few poets have been so completely representative of their time, have entered so fully into its moods, or have, to such a degree, first moulded and then satisfied the tastes of their contemporaries as Alfred Tennyson". In reflecting the restless spirit of his progressive age, Tennyson is as remarkable as Pope was in voicing the artificiality of the early eighteenth century. "As a poet, therefore, who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era". His poetry is a mirror which reflects the social, political, moral and religious trends and tendencies of the time. He reflects the general feelings of his age on the great things in this world—religion, morals, and social life. *Ulysses*, for instance, represents the spirit of enquiry, intellectual ferment and the quest for knowledge of the Victorian age. *In Memoriam* expresses the spiritual unrest and uncertainty of the people who lost their religious faith as a result of the

advancement of scientific ideas. This poem reveals the "torment of the modern soul oscillating between the hopes offered by Christianity and the negations of science". Besides, he is a great patriot and glorifies Victorian heroes (like the Duke of Wellington) in his poems. He also reflects the success and belief in national prosperity, that marked Victorian England. His representative character, besides his superb artistry, accounts for the wide popularity he achieved in his age.

The Ode on the Death of Wellington is the best specimen of a class of poems for which Tennyson was distinguished from first to last. He was always a patriot, and there is no feeling he expresses more fervently than that of pride in England. He contrasts her stability with the fickleness of France. He is proud of her freedom slowly won and surely kept. Patriotic ballads like *The Revenge* and *The Defence of Lucknow* are among the most prominent characteristics of his later volumes. His great success in the case of the *Wellington Ode* is due to the fact, first, that his heart is stirred by the sense that "the last great Englishman is low"; and secondly, to the fact that he saw in Wellington an impersonation of all that he had admired in England. The picture he draws of the Duke is identical in its great features with that he had painted of the nation, and it has the advantage of being concrete.

Tennyson was a master of dignified, often stately compliment. This Ode is the supreme instance of this mastery. It is not only a model of its kind, but it ranks with Milton's *Lycidas* and Shelley's *Adonias* among the great elegies of the English language. Despite the apparent irregularity of metre and rhyme, the form of this poem is firm, and precisely integrated with the subject. Tennyson is perhaps most consistently at his best in the elegiac mood, which dominates not only this poem and the best sections of *In Memoriam*, but also *Frater Ave Atque Vale, The Garden at Swainston*, and the lines to Lord Dufferin.

As a thinker and philosopher. He believed, and he was encouraged in this belief by his friends, that it was his

function as an artist to penetrate and to interpret the inner meaning of the modern spirit—to find a poetic expression alike for its religion and for its science. That he won considerable success in this task is attested by scientists, one of whom declared Tennyson's mind to be "saturated with astronomy", and another declared him to be "the first poet since Lucretius who has understood the drift of science". As to the other side, *In Memoriam* has been a gospel to thousands of souls who have felt the movement of modern thought and yet been conscious of the need of religion.

Whatever may be said of him as a philosopher, it may be granted that, in the region of ideas, he has produced some splendid poetry, and has illustrated the questioning spirit of his age. In the later poems his dismay at the pettiness of man's part and place in the cosmic evolution, at the vision of a Godless ocean undermining and swallowing up all definite beliefs, seems to have gradually quieted down into the conviction that a higher and purified existence surely awaits us. Such short pieces as *Doubt and Prayer*, *Faith*, *The Silent Voices* and others in the small volume of 1892 are generally hopeful and devout. Like all the great writers of his age, Tennyson is emphatically a teacher. Tennyson's theme, so characteristic of his age, is the reign of order—of law in the physical world, producing evolution; and of law in the spiritual world, working out the perfect man. *In Memoriam*, *The Idylls of the King*, *The Princess*—these are three widely different poems; yet the underlying idea of each is the orderly development of law in the natural and in the spiritual world. He expresses his belief in "one God, one law, one element". Stopford Brooke says that at the root of Tennyson's peotry lies "the ever-working immanence of God in man, the brotherhood of the human race, and its evolution into perfect love and righteousness: the continuance of each man's personal consciousness in the life to be; the vitality of the present—man alive, and Nature alive, and alive with the life of God".

He believed in the existence of a settled scheme of great purposes underlying a universal order and gradually developing to completion. He perceived the movement of Law throughout the world of sense and of spirit. He believed that the universe is "roll'd round by one fixt law". Allied to this faith was his sympathy with disciplined order in the various spheres of human action. In his teaching on social and political questions, his ideal is a majestic order, a gradual and regular development, without rest indeed, but, above all, without haste. He believes in the kind of freedom that had been evolved by the gradual growth of English institutions, a freedom which "slowly broadens down/From precedent to precedent". He had little faith in sudden outbursts of revolutionary ardour. He referred to the excesses of the French revolutionaries as the "red fool fury of the Seine". He believed that such outbursts retarded man's progress towards real liberty. If liberty is to be a solid and lasting possession, it must be gained by patient years of working and waiting. So also was his love for his own country regulated and philosophic. He did write a few patriotic martial lyrics that stir the blood like a trumpet call, as *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *The Revenge,* but on the whole his patriotism is founded on admiration for the splendid past of England. Though in youth he delighted in "the vision of the world and all the wonder that would be", yet neither in youth nor in age was he himself without some distrust of the new democratic forces which might end in "working their own doom".

> Step by step we gain'd a freedom known to Europe, known to all,
>
> Step by step we rose to greatness—thro' the tonguesters we may fall.

He reveals his spirit of reverence and self-control in his conception of the passion of love and in his portraiture of womanhood. Love in his verse is a pure unselfish passion. Even the guilty love of Launcelot and Guinevere is described

from a spiritual standpoint, in its evil effects rather than in any sensuous detail. His highest ideal of love is found in the pure passion of wedded life : true love can exist only under the sanction of Duty and of Reverence for womanhood and one's higher self. Such love is the source of man's loftiest ideas, and the inspiration of his noblest deeds. Examples of this treatment may be seen in *The Miller's Daughter*, *Enoch Arden*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, and *Guinevere*, and it underlies the moral lesson conveyed through *The Princess.*

The romantic note in Tennyson. Tennyson's romanticism lies chiefly in artistic perfection, but it lies also in his love of the Middle Ages. The romantic strain in him is apparent from *The Lady of Shalott* which is a poem of pure fancy and which shows his mediaeval interest. In this poem Tennyson reaches the highest romantic level. The supernatural element, the belief in magic, the strange confinement of the Lady, all contribute to a romantic atmosphere. Tennyson has written a number of other mediaeval tales, but in these he has merely misrepresented the Middle Ages.

The lyrical and elegiac quality of his verse. Tennyson's genius is chiefly lyrical just as Browning's is dramatic. Apart from the considerable number of short lyrics written by him, his longer poems too are lyrical in essence. His lyrical gift is nowhere better seen than in those poems where he expresses a sense of loss, that is, where the tone is elegiac. Hallam's exuberant, intellectual, kindly friendship provided Tennyson with precisely the support that his melancholy nature, with its "moods of misery unutterable", its philosophical and religious doubts required. And when Hallam died prematurely, Tennyson's overwhelming grief found its first expression in the lyrical poem, *The Two Voices* (or, *Thoughts of a Suicide*). *In Memoriam*, the great elegy which he wrote on the death of Arthur Henry Hallam, is highly lyrical by virtue of its passionate intensity, sincerity of utterance, and sweet melody. *Maud* is one long lyric or a series of beautiful

lyrics. The lyrical pieces in *The Process* possess an unsurpassed charm. *The Lady of Shalott* too, is lyrical because of its "haunting music".

His attitude to Nature. Tennyson does not, like the romantic poets, idealise Nature. To him, Nature is not a living presence capable of thinking and feeling. He does not recognise any moral or educative influence of Nature upon man; he does not advocate any mystical intercourse with her. One distinguishing feature of his treatment of Nature is his close, minute, or scientific observation of her. He studied Nature with a tireless fidelity and his pictures of Nature show, therefore, minuteness of detail and an accuracy of observation. His landscapes have a less manifold wealth of detail and a less purely sensuous intensity than those of Keats, and they have still less of Wordsworth's deep spiritual significance; but they are drawn and coloured with the conscious care of the pictorial artist who has studied them intently through half-closed eyes, noting the values of the colours, the balance and arrangement of the significant features.

In addition to his close observation of Nature, Tennyson believes with Coleridge that we interpret the moods of Nature according to our own and that Nature is happy or otherwise according as we are happy or otherwise. This belief often led him to describe and develop a human mood in terms of natural phenomena. In *The Lotos-Eaters* for instance, the indolence of the sailors is elaborated with reference to the pausing of steams, the lingering of the sun, the swooning of the languid air, etc. In *The Lady of Shalott*, when the curse descends upon the Lady, it is accompanied by a storm in Nature. In one of the most famous passages in *Maud*, the flowers are shown as experiencing the lover's intense passion and his feeling of pleasurable anticipation.

Tennyson also shows his awareness of the cruelty and waste in Nature. In *In Memoriam*, he refers to "Nature red in tooth and claw, with rapine". Being influenced by

science, he looks at Nature through the eyes of an evolutionist and says that Nature cares neither for the single life nor for the type.

A perfect craftsman. Tennyson's poems show an astonishing technical mastery and variety of supple and melodious versification. The colour and sound of his poems along with the flow and ease of their style greatly contributed to his popularity. He aimed at exquisiteness of style and metre more than anything else. He bestowed the greatest possible labour upon the writing of his poems and selected his words with great care. Among the elements of his power as an artist may be mentioned (*i*) felicity of diction; (*ii*) sound and word pictures; (*iii*) verbal music including alliteration, onomatopoeia, and assonance; (*iv*) picturesque and apt similes; and (*v*) a total absence of obscurity. Tennyson's variety of metrical accomplishment is astonishing. He had the finest ear of any English poet since Milton. He was the master of Swinburne; and the versification of Swinburne is often crude and sometimes cheap in comparison with Tennyson's. Tennyson extended very widely the range of active metrical forms in English: in *Maud* alone the variety is prodigious.

He brought to his "making" a richly imaginative and brooding mind, a trained and accurate eye, and a very fine ear for verbal music. The subtlety and variety of his "tunes" were unequalled by any of his great predecessors except Shelley.

Says George Saintsbury: "He (Tennyson) had added to English poetry a body of work which, though not the greatest contributed by any man, though falling short of Chaucer and Coleridge in fresh and original gift, of Spenser in uniform excellence and grasp of a huge subject, of Shakespeare in universality, in height and depth and every other feature, of Milton in grandeur and lonely sublimity, of Wordsworth in ethical weight and grip of nature behind the veil, of Shelley in unearthliness, and of Keats in independence and voluptuous spontaneity, yet deserves to be

ranked with the best of these, except Shakespeare only, in virtue of its astonishing display of poetic art. Tennyson had never, no matter what his detractors may say, come short in poetic thought; in poetic style he had shown a uniform mastery not elsewhere to be equalled, and a quality hardly elsewhere to be surpassed. He had carried the special poetic mission of the nineteenth century in English—that of applying the powers of colour, form and music to the investment of the largest possible number of themes with the imaginative suggestion of poetry—to a point not reached by any other, and in all his long and fertile career had never finally failed in a single application of them, putting of the dramatic attempts aside. He had justified that "return to nature"—of which the danger was that it should become as conventional, as cut and dried as the generalising away from nature which had preceded it—to a pitch, not merely by an infinity of fresh and felt observations, but by invariably touching these observations with the necessary point of generalisation itself. He is always real, but never conventional, but also never photographic. His music is more difficult to praise, because the ear is a more arbitrary sense than the eye. To those who have ears to hear, there is absolutely no poet so inexhaustible and original in harmony as Tennyson. The story of a hearer who knew no English, but knew Tennyson to be a poet by the hearing, is probable and valuable, or rather invaluable, for it points to the best, if not the only true, criterion of poetry".

The reaction against Tennyson. Tennyson joins one hand with three great poets of the Romantic Age—Byron, Shelley and Keats; the other he holds out to the Pre-Raphaelites. In the opinion of some, the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, at the age of 23, appears without doubt to have been the most painful, perhaps the only heart-rending sorrow of his life. *In Memoriam*, written in memory of his friend, was much loved by Queen Victoria after the death of her husband; and it is not, therefore, strange that by the publication of this beautiful, though uneven work,

Tennyson should have acquired during his life-time an applause almost unknown to any other poet. He was applauded by the whole nation, by scholar and sentimentalist alike. Following this, the *Idylls of the King*, his monumental work, was dedicated to Her Majesty. His fame was complete. It was, therefore, inevitable that adulation should, after his death, turn not merely into neglect, but even into violent, spiteful, and above all ignorant abuse.

Tennyson's work was undoubtedly very uneven ; indeed it appears almost impossible that the man who wrote *Tithonus*, *Ulysses* and other splendid poems should also have written *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, *The May Queen* and many others of this kind. No profound demonstration of any conviction, either social or personal, is found in his work. Unlike Shelley and Wordsworth no burning faith was his. No passionate convictions such as those of Dante or Goethe horrified or astounded the listening world. Yet despite this, he possessed a gift of prophecy seen in the lines in which he anticipates aerial navigation and the United Nations.

It has to be admitted that the intellectual reach of Tennyson, or his philosophical power,. was very limited. He had an exceptional command over words, and perhaps the finest of phrase among English poets. But he did not give an evidence of much original thinking Few poets have surpassed him in lyrical and descriptive verse. In *Ulysses*, *In Memoriam*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *The Lady of Shalott*, and *The Palace of Art*, it is his lyrical and descriptive gifts that impress us most. But unfortunately Tennyson did not recognise his intellectual and philosophical limitations and took his role of teacher or leader too seriously. It was for this reason chiefly that a reaction against him set in not long after his death. His philosophical poems do not express any eternal truth and do not reveal any spiritual vision or the highest ideal. "So, with the emergence of new thinking, modern social ideals, and a more penetrating psychological

and social analysis, the fashion for Tennyson and Victorianism passed away". Tennyson was insular and conventional. He excluded not only the Continent from his sympathy but Scotchmen and the Irsih also. This makes him un-universal. Besides, in dealing with the Middle Ages, he made the mistake of giving a Victorian character to the mediaeval knights and ladies and advocating Victorian standards of morality. That is why he came in for a lot of criticism from the moderns. Tennyson's various technical excellences—"the fine ear", the mellifluousness and the "vowel-music", the "word-pictures" and the mastery of figurative devices—have been widely commented on. These qualities are not in themselves guarantees of poetic greatness; but they have a wide popular appeal. His most fervent admirers in the present century have praised him as a musician, as a landscape-painter, as a creator of moods, and occasionally as a visionary. They have felt unable to defend him as a philosopher and as a prophet; and indeed it seems unlikely that any future generation will be able to think of Tennyson as his contemporaries thought of him—as a great thinker, as seer and sage. But one can confidently say that he will never fail to attract a large number of readers because of his excellent craftsmanship and superb artistry.

While a considerable amount of Tennyson's writing is marred by its over-elaboration and mannerism, these weaknesses do not run throughout his verse. His finest poetry is quite free from these faults. There is nothing "Tennysonian" in *Thor*, *St. Simeon Stylites*, the *Northern Farmer*, or the *New Timon and the Poets*: or rather we may say that these poems are Tennysonian in their proper command of language, imagery and metrical design. Sometimes the verse is complex and allusive in its form diction and imagery: sometimes it is of the utmost simplicity. His blank verse ranges from lyrical gravity to lines of the utmost lightness and flexibility. In his lyrical and dramatic poetry, Tennyson speaks with the voice of passion, bitterness, invective and rant; the heavy longing of love broken or unfulfilled; grief or compassion, in formal tones or with familiarity, delicacy and tact.

If we recognise anything as Tennysonian in his finest works, it is the recurrence of certain situations and moods where his creative imagination responds most deeply and lyrically to the experiences of horror, doubt, isolation and loss, of friends absent or dead, of scenes and events recalled from the past. T. S. Eliot may be right in saying that Tennyson is "the saddest of all English poets", but Tennyson is surely a great deal more.

Matthew Arnold said that Tennyson lacked intellectual power. But others, not less fitted than Arnold to judge, did not observe the want, partly because they were under the same limitations themselves, but more because they found in Tennyson the most complete statement of the great philosophic issues of the age: if not an answer to its problems, at least an indication of the lines along which the answer was to be sought.

The denigrators of Victorianism have now themselves fallen out of favour. It is for the present generation to see him in proper perspective. For the modern poet, it is true, Tennyson is still not a living force. But Tennyson has never ceased to be widely read; his poems have always had a steady sale: and in recent years critical appreciation of his work has been steadily growing. T. S. Eliot admires him for his abundance, variety, and complete competence. Tennyson did not produce any monumental work of genius—such as *Paradise Lost*; he has not given the world a new vision of itself as Wordsworth did; he may even have written nothing quite so indispensable in the English poetic tradition as two or three pieces by Marvell. Yet the abundance, the variety, and the competence, the superlative technical excellence, are indisputable, and Tennyson's essential greatness cannot be denied.

Arthur J. Carr, in his essay on "Tennyson as a Modern Poet", and E.D.H. Johnson in his study entitled "The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry", have tried to confront the problems presented by the ambiguities and contradictions of

Tennyson's later poetry. Johnson seems to be right in his central argument that Tennyson was often fundamentally at odds with the official values of his day, and that he continued to the end of his life to express "private insights" even while framing his work to meet the requirements of a popular audience. Says Johnson: "Tennyson held aloof from his age and continued to live most intensely within the world of his own mind ..Thus, many of the poems which seem to be indisputably the products of Victorian literary convention have an extra dimension which, once recognised, relates them to the deeper sources of the author's poetic vision".

Arthur J. Carr says that Tennyson is our true precursor. Tennyson shows and hides, as if in embryo, a master theme of Joyce's *Ulysses*—the accentuated and moody self-consciousness and the sense of loss that mark Stephen Dedalus. He forecasts Yeats's interest in the private myth. He apprehended in advance of Aldous Huxley the uses of mysticism to denounce materialistic culture. And in *Maud* at least, he prepares the way for the verse of Eliot's *Preludes* and *Prufrock*. According to Carr, Tennyson is a modern poet at some crucial points.

For an age that demanded of poetry "reality of emotional impulse", Harold Nicolson boiled the essential Tennyson down to "a morbid and unhappy mystic, afraid of death, and sex, and God". A little later, T.S. Eliot boldly call him a great poet, because of his abundance, variety, and complete competence". When W.H. Auden made up a selection of Tennyson's poetry very much as Nicolson had specified, he conceded that Tennyson "had the finest ear, perhaps, of any English poet"; then he added "he was undoubtedly the stupidest; there was little about melancholia that he did not know; there was little else that he did".

Tennyson and Browning. The distinctive qualities of Tennyson and Browning are so well marked that each poet

sets the other in relief. "A great thinker in verse", said Tennyson of Browning; and again, "He has plenty of music in him, but cannot get it out; he has intellect enough for a dozen of us, but he has not got the glory of words". Browning's obscurity, when he was engaged upon his minute mental anatomy, and his manner of leaving—his thoughts rough hewn, are points of contrast with Tennyson's clear and chiselled phrasing. The peculiarity of Browning's genius—the strain and hard service that he imposed upon the English tongue—place him to some extent outside the right succession, in its direct line, of the national poets of England, of those who have enlarged the capacity of the language for imaginative and musical expression, without subjecting the instrument to rough usage. But Tennyson may certainly be counted among them.

Conclusion. When all is said and done, there is much in Tennyson to admire and value. There is the hard-headed common sense, with a touch of humour to give it a cutting edge. This quality one certainly does not think of so readily in connection with Tennyson, but it is there. It is there not only in the two *Northern Farmer* poems, but also in *St. Simeon Stylites*. St. Simeon's feat of enduring rain, wind, frost, heat, hail, sleet and snow, on the top of a pillar reduces the monastic ideal to absurdity. This man believes in a martrydom of mortification in order to ensure his entry into heaven. The poem is in spirit close to burlesque, though it is subtly done.

It is to be noted also that, while the twentieth century has thought Tennyson to be limited and regrettable because of his being so often "escapist" and "literary", he was in his own time thought of as a modernist and as one who brought modern life into poetry. The following comment by a contemporary is significant; "He dares, in every page, to make use of modern words and notions ..". He was indeed, receptive and unconventional enough to make "literary" poetry out of the new features of industrial England :

Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing
grooves of change.

These lines from *Locksley Hall* contain perhaps the first "railway image" in English poetry. But Tennyson was most sensitive to the implications of the biological and geological discoveries of his century. He was far quicker than his contemporaries to see where those investigations were leading. Less and less did it seem easy to believe that man was God's special creature. A long standing belief had thus received a heavy blow. This is reflected in *In Memoriam*, and gives to the poem its own special character; for the poem is not simply a lament for a dead individual but also for a broken image. Man was being proved to be part of Nature in which no moral purpose could be found. It is this disillusionment that feeds the underlying pessimism of *Maud*. All that one could see was a blind biological drive in the universe without any moral or spiritual purpose. "Birth, copulation, and death", as T.S. Eliot has put it. Tennyson was, indeed, deeply troubled. He experienced an acute uncertainty about the things that mattered most—God, immortality, the nature of man and the nature of Nature. In the face of uncertainties, he generally asserts faith. It is the tension between belief and doubt that makes the poet's sensibility something stronger than is suggested by the usual word "melancholy". It is partly for this sensibility that he survives for the modern generation.

The modern reader still finds himself interested by the sheer number of memorable poems which Tennyson wrote. So many phrases, from "kind hearts and coronets" to "a waste land" and "a handful of dust" have become part of the mid-twentieth century English language. His feeling for words was not Shakespearean. Other poets too have surpassed him in using the language creatively. But even so, Tennyson is a poet of sufficient distinction from this point of view. Then there is his skill in sound. His onomatopoeia, for instance, often brings off a descriptive passage with rare brilliance, such as the following :

Dry clash'd harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

(*Morte d'Arthur*)

Hard consonants here are seconded by the percussive force of monosyllables and the forward drawing of run-on lines—to make real the harsh, jagged landscape and the efforts of body and spirit. These are lines of a classic quality, marvellously effective. Tennyson's sea-scapes carry a sense of feeling and strength of imagination which go beyond mere scene-painting. The sea counted for much in Tennyson's imagination. It was a dominant image in his mind. In one of his earliest poems, we have the following lines :

The mighty waves of moaning waters lay
So goldenly in moonlight, whose clear lamp
With its long line of vibratory lustre
Trembled on the dun surface, that my spirit
Was buoyant with rejoicings

(*The Devil and the Lady*)

Such lines carry a world of feeling, Tennyson's sense of beauty in the creation around him, and a yearning, desolate consciousness of isolation : this is the "private" poet of the early years, and it remains the most commonly admired and appreciated part of Tennyson's work. At very least there is the magic of the story-book as in the description of the reapers in *The Lady of Shalott*. At most there is a beauty of image and sound that is individual and perfect, as in the opening lines of *Tithonus*.

2

Tennyson As A Representative Poet of His Age

1. His finest poetry is an illustrative record of the prevailing spirit, temperament, and character of his times.
2. Salient features of the age. "He spoke for the English conscience of the Victorian Age".
3. "Locksley Hall". Some of the Laureate poems. Oracle and prophetic interpreter of the ideals, the fears, the tastes and prejudices of the period.
4. "The Princess", "The Palace of Art", "St. Simeon Stylites", "The Vision of Sin", "The Two Voices", "In Memoriam", "Maud", "The Idylls of the King".
5. Every great national event and political change left a mark on his poetry.
6. He shared all the doubts and fears of his age in the religious sphere—"The Two Voices", "The Vision of Sin" "Vastness". "In Memoriam" a national confessional.
7. He took full cognisance of the discoveries of modern science and its conclusions.

Speaking broadly, the ideas, feelings, and manners of a period of history may be seen reflected in the imaginative literature of that period. M. Taine goes a little too far in

saying that any considerable literary work will exhibit, under careful analysis, not only the writer's state of mind, his experiences and way of life, but also the long-descended influences of race and tradition, the temper of his time, and the general intellectual condition of his nation. But it is, on the whole, true to say that the literature of a nation reveals, to a great extent, the psychology of the period during which it was produced. And of all forms of literature, poetry is the most intense expression of the dominant emotions and the higher ideals of an age. This point of view is particularly true of the poetry of Tennyson. It cannot be denied that one single writer, however eminent, cannot be regarded as the intellectual representative of his society. Nevertheless, Tennyson's popularity grew so steadily and spread so widely for nearly sixty years, and his influence over his generation was so remarkable, that his finest poetry may undoubtedly be treated as an illustrative record of the prevailing spirit, of the temperament, and to some degree of the national character of his period. His poetry undoubtedly represents the ideas and tastes, the inherited predilections, the prevailing currents of thought, of Englishmen belonging to his class and his generation. As Hugh Walker puts it, Tennyson was not merely a great man but, with the exception of Carlyle, the most complete and comprehensive representative of his age.

The salient features of his age were moderation in politics, refined culture, religious liberalism chequered by doubt, a lively interest in the advance of scientific discovery coupled with the fear that it might lead people astray, attachment to ancient institutions, larger views of the duty of the State towards its people, and increasing sympathy with poverty and distress. All these feelings and tendencies find their expression in Tennyson's poems. In the direction of political ideals, his imaginative faculty enabled him sometimes not only to observe the movement but also to lead the way. The conception of the empire found a powerful utterance in his verse. He saw that the imperial edifice had been quietly built by men of devotion and he called upon

all English-speaking people to join hands and consolidate it. His stately verse had something to do with promoting the revival and spread of a profound veneration for the Throne as the common centre and head of a scattered dominion. In all these respects, therefore, it is only right to treat Tennyson as a representative of the Victorian period, and to draw inferences from his work as to the general intellectual and political tendencies of the 19th century. "He spoke for the English conscience of the Victorian age". (Aubrey de Selincourt).

Among the signs of his time may be noticed, in particular, the influence on his poetry of the scientific spirit, the growth of accurate habits of observation, the demand for exactitude in details, for minute delineation of accessories, for a patient study of small things ; the spirit, in fact, which affected art and literature in the form of what came to be called realism. No poet has been more anxious than Tennyson about precision in his landscape painting, or more carefully correct in his allusions to animals and plants ; and in most instances the precision of fact strengthens the ornamental form.

He was very much aware of the intellectual currents of his time. He read widely in the contemporary literature of science, geology, and astronomy, and he gave much thought to the condition of Victorian society and to the directions in which that society was likely to develop. Too much has been made of his not especially original prophecies of aerial warfare and world government in *Locksley Hall* ; yet these do suggest that the poem could only have been written by an alert and well-informed mind which was acutely receptive to contemporary ideas and attitudes. The final effect of this poem is confused and ambiguous, largely because the speaker is a sensitive but arrogant and somewhat unbalanced young man. The ambiguity, however, is itself an indication of the way in which Tennyson's lack of intellectual strength may actually give his work a special interest for the modern reader. His work not only often reflects the changing mood

of the period, as may be seen in such Laureate poems as the *Ode Sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition*, and the verses *To The Queen*, but also its constant ambiguity and self-contradiction serve to direct our attention to the deep divisions and instabilities within the whole Victorian edifice.

J. H. Buckley says : "By 1842 Tennyson had become to many the true Laureate of Victorian England, long before the Queen's minister was able to offer him that title. And for a full half-century he retained his place as oracle, as prophetic interpreter of the ideals, the fears, the tastes and prejudices of a troubled and tumultuous age".

His poems reflect the complex tendencies of his age and his surroundings in all the great spheres of human thought—religion, morals, social life. Not, it may be, the most advanced ideas, or the latest speculation ; but the broad results of culture and experience upon the poet's English contemporaries. The ground of Tennyson's claim to be considered a representative poet of his age is seen in the lines of thought pursued in some of these poems which deal with the great problems and paramount interests of his time. In *Locksley Hall* (1842), the speaker, after giving vent to his own tale of passions and regret, becomes the mouthpiece of the young hopes and aspirations of the Liberalism of the early Victorian era, while in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, the doubts and distrust felt by Conservatism of more recent times find dramatic utterance. *The Princess* deals with a question of lasting interest to society, and one which has now risen into conspicuous importance, the changing position and proper sphere of woman. In *The Palace of Art*, the poet describes and condemns a spirit of aestheticism which ignores human responsibilities and obligations to one's fellow men. In *St. Simeon Stylites*, he equally condemns the evils of a self-centred religious asceticism which is indifferent to the active duties of daily life. *The Vision of Sin* deals with the perversion of nature and with the final despair resulting from the pursuit of sensual pleasure. *Two Voices*

illustrates the self-analysis with which the age discusses the fundamental problem of existence, finding all solutions vain except those dictated by the simplest voices of the conscience and the heart. *In Memoriam* is the history of a human soul confronted with the stern, relentless order of the universe and the seeming waste and cruelty of death. The poem traces the progress of sorrow from the Valley of Death, over-shadowed by the darkness of unspeakable loss, through the regions of philosophic doubt and meditation to the serene heights of resignation and hope, where Faith and Love can triumph over Death in the confident hope of a life beyond. *Maud* is dated at the conclusion of that long period of peace which ended with the Crimean war when the commercial prosperity of England had reached a height unknown before, and when money was the sole god. The poem gives a dramatic rendering of the revolt of a cultured mind against the hypocrisy and corruptions of a society degraded by the worship of Mammon, though the hero inherits a vein of insanity and speaks too bitterly. The *Idylls of the King* deals with the spreading mischief of a moral taint and here, too, Tennyson expresses one of the deepest convictions of his time.

He was among the most patriotic of poets, and he lost no opportunity of singing the glories of England, whether for her political stability or for her renown in arms. Almost every great national event and political change became the theme of his verse. The revolutionary year 1848, the *coup d'etat* in France, the rumours of a French invasion, the question of the sufficiency of the fleet, the death of Wellington, the Crimean war and the War of Independance, have all left their mark on his poetry. But this by no means measures the full range of his interests. In *In Memoriam* he earnestly makes an attempt to reconcile the science which he studied so deeply with the religion which many believed to be undermined by him. *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* is a passionate protest against the merely material interpretation of the universe: He studied deeply the thought, the aspirations and the needs of his day, and applied all the lore of his art to these. Even the Arthurian legends in the

Idylls of the King were expressed by him in language of the nineteenth century and were adapted to the sentiment of that period. When Tennyson goes back to the Middle Ages, he usually does so in obedience to the fashion of the time, rather than because his imagination naturally leads him there; and so little is he at home in those ages that even his imagination does not save him from occasional absurdity. In short, he made it the great end of his art to express the modern spirit, and the delineation of other times only a means to that end. And this is one great reason for his popularity. Every age is primarily interested in itself; and Tennyson had things to say which went home alike to the statesman of his time, to the man of science, to the man who doubted and to the man who believed.

The modern spirit grew stronger in Tennyson as the years passed. Much of the early verse might belong to any age, and some of it really breathes the spirit of the past; there is more of mediaevalism in *The Lady of Shalott* than in all the *Idylls of the King*. But after 1842, this is rare; Tennyson becomes the poet of his own time. The change is manifest in *The Princess* (1847). Althouga it ranks low among his works, in several respects it is worthy of attention. It is an attempt to deal in verse with a great modern problem. The questions of the proper position of women in society, the functions they might legitimately and usefully try to perform in addition to family duties, and the education which would fit them for those functions, were just beginning te be discussed in England, and Tennyson in *The Princess* gives voice to them. For him it was a great change.

In Tennyson's religious and philosophical poems the voice of doubt is always heard. Yet the poems end almost always on a note of optimism. There is a conflict in all of Tennyson's religious poetry from the beginning to the end of his career. In *The Two Voices*, this conflict is vividly and clearly dramatised in the form of a dialogue between the poet and the bitter voice of disillusionment and despair. As long as the discussion is confined to earthly life, the

voice of despair has the upper hand, and every argument against suicide is effectively answered. But when the discussion moves to the question of immortality, that voice is silenced. The argument in favour of immortality is that man finds in his soul ideas of eternity and perfection which cannot be realised on earth and which must, therefore, have an existence elsewhere. The vague evidence of "mystic gleams" strengthens this argument which is further confirmed by the appearance of a Victorian family going to church. Towards the end of the poem a new voice speaks encouragingly of "a hidden hope" giving rise to the feeling that "every cloud, that spreads above/And veileth love, itself is love". Similarly, at the end of *The Vision of Sin*, the poet says that "God made Himself an awful rose of dawn". At the end of *Vastness*, the catalogue of negations is closed with an abrupt reversal:

> Peace, let it be ! for I loved him, and love him
> Forever : the dead are not dead but alive.

In such poems the conflict between the need to believe and the difficulty of believing is evident. Tennyson is seen clinging almost desperately to the central, indispensable belief that our life on earth is meaningless without the hope of immortality.

Such is the essense, and almost the sum, of Tennyson's position with regard to religion. He was not concerned to defend the dogmas of historical Christianity. The concluding stanza of *In Memoriam* reads as follows :

> That God, which ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves.

These lines are certainly an assertion of faith, but they do not seem to be specifically Christian. In other words, there is a doctrinal indefiniteness in Tennyson. The age of

Tennyson was shaken by new scientific discoveries, by theories of evolution, by historical criticism of the Bible, and by a general breakdown of the old religious, ethical and social beliefs. Tennyson shared all the doubts and fears of his age. Nevertheless, he emerged with some kind of religious conviction still intact. His readers were not troubled by his doctrinal indefiniteness. In fact, it must have been a matter of some satisfaction to them that the poet's religious doubts found a full and eloquent expression before they were superseded by faith. This was one of the reasons for the immense popularity of *In Memoriam*. The poem came to be looked upon as a kind of national confessional, with a comfortable feeling of divine forgiveness at the end.

Tennyson did not ignore or reject the new theory of evolution nor any of the evidence of modern science. This fact contributed all the more to Tennyson's popularity in the eyes of his contemporaries. He accepted all facts as facts. He admitted that it was impossible to fight against the findings of the human reason. He recognised and welcomed all the discoveries of modern science and its conclusions. People realised that Tennyson, far from evading the problems of the age, faced them squarely. He did not refuse to acknowledge facts because they disagreed with his own theory, and he did not twist facts to suit his own prejudices.

Tennyson did not have any coherent system of reasoned attitudes and beliefs. We cannot, therefore speak, of his having any "philosophy" as such. But almost all his poetry is indicative of a strongly-felt need to believe and of a desperate search for a confirmation of his faith. He did not lose his faith, though it always remained precarious. The result of this is sometimes valuable, as in the visionary moment so movingly described in Section XCV of *In Memoriam*. But often the sense of uncertainty leads only to an exaggeration of familiar Victorian attitudes. One is reminded, for example, of the excessively loud patriotism and the exaltation of war found in *Maud*, of his frequent celebrations of Victorian family life and of male superiority,

and of his insistence on the qualities of self-reverence, self knowledge, self-control in the presentation of such heroes as King Arthur.

Tennyson came increasingly to look upon himself as the prophet and interpreter of his age. He was encouraged in this belief by the attitude of worship of his friends and by the popularity of his religious and didactic works. Most modern readers are repelled by this aspect of Tennyson's later career. But it has to be recognised that his poetry served a most valuable purpose in his own day. As a critic (Sir Harold Nicolson) says, a poet of that age would have indeed been limited and selfish if he had not responded to the crying spiritual needs of the time. In spite of the faults that we may find in Tennyson, we must remember that his poetry, even those many pieces which we now ridicule, brought great comfort to many unhappy people of that time. His thought may seem shallow and insincere to many modern readers, but "it was hailed by millions of his countrymen as penetrating, audacious and profound".

3

The Reaction Against Tennyson

1. Scoffers and critics in Tennyson's own time.
2. Twentieth century reaction—Max Beerbohm, G. B. Shaw, G. K. Chesterton, A. C. Bradley, Harold Nicolson, Hugh I'Anson Fausset, W. H. Auden.
3. The criticism of the sentimental, the heavily moralistic, the softly dreamy, the noisily patriotic, sides of Tennyson. Tennyson's support of the Victorian attitude to woman.
4. Tennyson's glorification of the blind military heroism also jars upon the modern reader.
5. His alleged undue concern for the musical and decorative qualities of language. Criticism by G. M. Hopkins.
6. Tennyson expresses many of the things that are least attractive about Victorian England.
7. Rnpert Brooke's gibe.
8. Faults of Tennyson as a poet. "Lawn Tennyson".
9. Tennyson had represented the industrial age in its years of self-complacency and self-satisfaction. The natural reaction of the next generation.
10. Reaction against the philosophy and attitudes of his works

11. **The unsympathetic criticisms of Harold Nicolson and Professor Baum.**

12. **A different view expressed by F.H. Buckley.**

13. **Conclusion—the opinion of a lesser but perceptive critic, Mildred Bozman.**

The reaction against Tennyson was part of the reaction against most things Victorian. Actually speaking, criticism was rarely silent during Tennyson's own life-time. Even when he had become most securely a national institution, there were persons like Samuel Butler to scoff at Tennyson. There were others like Edward FitzGerald who thought that Tennyson had been in decline since 1842. Other critics attacked him for lack of refinement and decorum. *In Memoriam* was called atheistic ; *Maud* was described as cacophonous ; the *Idylls* were dubbed as immoral. He was charged with being, like the best modern Gothic, faultless in detail and proportion, yet lacking in freshness and vigour, wanting in original daring and impulse. Matthew Arnold found an intellectual deficiency in him. "What his domestic life has gained in sobriety," wrote a critic in 1871 "his poetry has lost in intensity ; his voice is mild as the sucking dove's when he communes with Nature or rails against mankind." Later, in the eighties, Swinburne intermingled with praise of Tennyson a harsh criticism. But generally Tennyson's reputation went on growing. At his death, preachers all over the country praised him as a great Christian, a great Englishman, and a great "singer". When the reaction came, it was naturally of an extreme kind. Commentators reacted partly against the solemnity of Tennyson's poetry. An example of this kind of reaction was Max Beerbohm's *Mr. Tennyson Reading "In Memoriam" to his Sovereign*. Samuel Butler's mockery found an echo in that of Shaw who said that any healthy mind would be more interested in *tit bits* than in *The Idylls of the King*. G. K. Chesterton said that Tennyson had a great deal to say, but that he had much more power of expression than was wanted for anything he had to express. According to

Chesterton, Tennyson could not think up to the height of his own style. There was also the feeling that Tennyson belonged to things that were dead. This created the temptation to laugh at him or debunk him A. C. Bradley wrote in 1914 : "To care for his poetry is to be old-fashioned, and to belittle him is to be in the movement". Since then, Tennyson has been placed as a major talent (though not a major poet), weakened by a whole complex of forces, psychological, literary and social. Far from being the "thought-worn chieftain",[1] he has often seemed quite incapable of rational discourse, a lyrist who deserted his true inspiration whenever he descended to the arena of Victorian controversy. His gifts, it is said, were primarily emotional, elegiac, the source of a melancholy meditation occasionally exquisite in its sensibility, but seldom conducive to a meaningful grasp of broader social problems. Harold Nicolson pictures him as a lonely, frustrated singer of the foggy moors, a tortured soul most sincere in his heart-sick despair. Hugh I'Anson Fausset feels him "essentially the poet of delicate, sometimes mystical sensuousness, rarely able to transmute his opinions into passionate convictions". W.H. Auden, granting him perhaps the finest ear in English poetry, finds him "undoubtedly the stupidest" of English poets, learned only in the arts of melancholia. W.H. Auden's comment is typical of the reaction.

Modern readers are inclined to ridicule poems like *Lilian* and *The May Queen*. They dislike the sentimental, the heavily moralistic, the softly dreamy the noisily patriotic, and the earnestly muddled sides of Tennyson. An example of his sentimentalism is the lines describing the dying May Queen. All the tricks of deliberately incited emotionalism

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1. On Tennyson's death, even Thomas Henry Huxley was moved to rhyme and wrote as follows :

And lay him gently down among
The men of state, the men of song :
The men who would not suffer wrong :
The thought-worn chieftains of the mind,
Head servants of the human kind.

are there. Modern readers also feel irritated by the prim, curate-like tone of his words to young women, as in *Maud* :

> If one should ask me whether
> The habit, hat and feather,
> Or the frock and gypsy bonnet
> Be the neater and completer,
> For nothing can be sweeter
> Than maiden Maud in either.

Poems like *Adeline* and *Rosalind* are also in much the same vein : that of a man looking for some pretty creature to put in his doll's house. Tennyson more or less lent his authority to the idealisation of woman. This stood in the way of a full and natural life for women in a far more subtle and formidable manner than the attitude of the school of thought according to which a woman's place was in the home. The insistence on reverence for womanhood, with its purity, erected one vast falsehood somewhere at the centre of life. Woman could be passionate but not sexual. She must endure her husband's animal nature and love him in spite of it. He in the meantime must hate it in himself and try to crush it as a "vice of blood". This seems to have been the Victorian attitude, and Tennyson threw the weight of his moral teaching to support and strengthen it. It is for this reason that the speech-making of King Arthur to his fallen Queen now appears intolerably pompous to the reader, though it must have been deeply moving then.

Tennyson's glorification of blind military heroism also jars upon the modern reader to some extent. He certainly had some excuse for the war-mongering found in *Maud*. Enthusiasm for the Crimean war was at first very general. But our respect for Tennyson would have considerably been increased if, instead of encouraging the barbarism, he had responded to the reports of dreadful suffering in the military hospitals which were being published in the papers. But no ; he took delight in exalting brainless military discipline :

Theirs not to make relpy,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Some of the principal criticisms brought against Tennyson are that he showed undue concern for the musical and decorative qualities of language, and that he developed a too characteristic style which in the course of time hardened into *mannerism*, an artful yet unimaginative handling of words and rhythms This was the essence of G.M. Hopkins's reaction to *Enoch Arden* in 1864. In particular, Hopkins referred to a favourite passage, the description of the tropical island. He acknowledged the beauty of the passage, but found the verse and diction predictable, too recognisably Tennysonian, as other critics have · remarked of *The Gardener's Daughter* and *The Passing of Arthur*. Such poems display an unrivalled exploitation of language for the musical effects of alliteration, assonance and rhythm. On occasion, Tennyson's prime concern appears to be with the aesthetic medium, the emotional overtones, and the verbal music, rather than with verbal meaning. As Arnold says, we meet "an extreme subtlety and curious elaborateness of expression distilled thoughts in distilled words". This was the "over-elaboration", according to Edward FitzGerald, which had crippled "a man of genius". Tennyson's declared aim was "to get the workmanship as near perfection as possible". He knew of his tendency to lapse into what he called "the foolish facility of Tennysonian verse". On one occasion he remarked : "People sometime say how 'studiedly alliterative' Tennyson's verse is. Why, when I spout my lines first, they come out so alliteratively that I have sometimes no end of trouble to get rid of the alliteration".

Tennyson's reputation has yet to recover from the shifts in popular taste and critical fashion that have occurred over the last sixty years. Even today he is sneered at for

his so-called Victorianism and his poetry quoted in evidence of the romantic decline. Tennyson indeed expresses many of the things we find least attractive about Victorian England—its stuffiness, its complacency, its narrow-mindedness, its imperialist fervour, its pietism, its repressive domesticity and paternalism. It would not be difficult to compile an anthology of his poetry to illustrate every one of these features. The popular view of Tennyson during his life-time is equally disturbing to us—the poet as literary hero, and also seer, sage and saint. Since he was very much a man of his own age, the age which followed it could not appreciate him. "I am now convalescent", wrote Rupert Brooke a few years before World War I," and can sit up and take a little warm milk and Tennyson". It was a familiar sarcasm, this suggestion that Tennyson was a fit companion only for invalids, and fit reading for the sick.

His men and women are often like the shadows that the Lady of Shalott pictured in her magic web. His philosophy is sometimes shallow and wavering. Frequently he lacks true virility and power. There is a lusciousness in his style, a sweetness that more than anything else has discredited his work in the eyes of critics. "Lawn Tennyson" he has been jokingly called with reference to the well-ordered beauty of a garden rather than the untrimmed loveliness of Nature which his poetry possesses. Only in the last few years has he, at least in part, begun to come into his own again.

As the nineteenth century drew to its close, Tennyson's reputation began to be assailed, and his fame began rapidly to decline, and for a brief period between the two World Wars was almost totally eclipsed. Tennyson had represented the industrial age in its years of self-complacency and self-satisfaction. The new writers of the twentieth century were beginning to be aware of the cruel wounds which that age had inflicted on the spirit of man. In the new age, Tennyson's grace and classic charm began to be dismissed as facile sweetness. All the security which he reflected seemed in

danger. Impatient as always, the young people turned from him because he wrote of things which they had not experienced and could not understand. Their distaste for one of the most material periods in man's history was turned unfairly against its great interpreter.

The popularity which Tennyson enjoyed at the height of his career has never been achieved by any other Engilsh poet during his life-time. Such a reputation could not have lasted. Tennyson was perhaps aware of this. He is believed to have said, "Modern fame is nothing. I'd rather have an acre of land. I shall go down, down! I'm up now; action and reaction". And Tennyson's prediction has come true. The reaction against Tennyson began even before his death. After his death (1892), the reaction became not only manifest but forceful. However, it was primarily a reaction against the philosophy and attitudes of Tennyson's works its representative Victorian quality, rather than the poetic craftsmanship. The reaction against him was part of the general debunking of the Victorians which found its climax in Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). The intensity of the reaction against Tennyson was due largely to the fact that Victorian admiration for him had been based, not so much on his poetic qualities, as on people's feeling of gratitude to him for the solace he offered as a thinker and teacher. Arnold had said in 1860 that Tennyson was deficient in intellectual power, and Arnold was not alone in this view, even among his contemporaries. But the vast amount of Victorian opinion, from T. H. Huxley downwards, regarded Tennyson as a philosopher and seer, the supreme interpreter of his age, and "the great voice of Victorian England". This particular aspect of Tennyson has not found favour with the twentieth century.

Sir Harold Nicolson justifies to some extent Tennyson's peculiar relationship within age but, as a twentieth century critic, he has little real sympathy with Tennyson in his role as interpreter and sage. Other twentieth century critics have been even less sympathetic. A particularly harsh

judgment has been expressed by Professor Baum who says that Tennyson, because of the emotional poverty of his private life and because of an absence of inner fire and spiritual energy in him, felt that his task was to understand and reveal to his readers the true inwardness of his age. Says Professor Baum, "It was an impossible task, certainly, for a sensitive and reclusive man, with a strong inherited melancholy, disinclined to face the slings and arrows of the critics, and with only mediocre intellectual endowment." However, an opposite view is expressed by J.H. Buckley, according to whom Tennyson, sensitive to the moral and spiritual confusions of his time, familiar with the new sciences, aware of imminent social change and crisis, was the voice and sometimes indeed the conscience of Victorian culture. Tennyson's work, says this critic, will endure, even apart from its aesthetic worth, as a mirror of his civilisation. Buckley, however, does not accept the distinction that some critics have repeatedly drawn between the bard of public sentiments and the earlier poet of private sensibilities. According to Buckley, there was no real break in Tennyson's career ; from the beginning Tennyson felt some responsibility to the society he lived in. Buckley has probably in mind critics like Sir Harold Nicolson and F. L. Lucas both of whom have praised the early Tennyson at the expense of the later. Nicolson fimly rejects Tennyson the Laureate in favour of Tennyson, the sensitive, subjective poet of loneliness and despair : Tennyson the "morbid and unhappy mystic".

Nicolson tries to rescue Tennyson from himself and from his age, and to identify and celebrate those limited aspects of his work which can still be appreciated by modern riaders : "And thus, if we consider it reasonable and right that Tennyson should also stand among the poets, let us, for the present, forget the delicate Laureate of a cautious age ; the shallow thought, the vacant compromise ; the honeyed idyll, the complacent ode ; ...let us recall only the low booming of the North Sea upon the dunes ; the grey clouds lowering above the world ; the moan of the night wind...".

Baum's conclusions are substantially in line with Nicolson's, but he differs considerably over points of detail; and his argument is generally more hostile to Tennyson. Buckley, on the other hand, completely rejects Nicolson's position and starts from the assumption that Tennyson is a great poet.

These modern critics have all made valuable contribution to our knowledge and understanding of Tennyson's work. The differences between them, however, show just how widely critical estimates of Tennyson continue to diverge. There is still no general consensus of opinion as to whether or not Tennyson is a great poet, or even a good poet. In any case the weight of the reaction against him should not be exaggerated. A sober body of criticism has continued to esteem him more justly and there is a revival of interest in his poetry. As a commentator puts it: "It is probably still too soon to estimate Tennyson's real position among the English poets, nor is it a matter of much concern that we should try to do so. We live in an age still in acute reaction against the ethics and aesthetics of his, and it must be left for men at some future time to judge him with detachment. If he was not an original thinker, neither was he a shallow one, and his poetry reflects many of the great dilemmas of his own and of all ages...".

F.L. Lucas pertinently observes: "Disappointment with Tennyson, reaction against him, arise from giving to his poetry for what it does not really give. He will not provide the mystic consolation some still find in Wordsworth; he has not the intellectual courage of Ibsen or Hardy; do not ask him for the passion of the Ballads, or Burns, or Byron, or Emile Bronte; he cannot draw character like Chaucer or Shakespeare, or even Crabbe; he cannot tell a story, unless it be short like *The Lady of Shalott* or the *Morte d'Arthur*." We should go to him, says this critic, for his exquisite Nature imagery. It is by this outstanding gift for capturing natural sights and sounds that he has become an enduring part of Nature herself. "In the trembling of

autumn holly-hocks, in the moonlit mists of December, in the larches and lap-wings of the spring, in the looming trees of summer darkness and the litlte chirping cries of summer dawn, his memory is there. Because of him the very earth has become more beautiful.''

Douglas Bush thus defends Tennyson : "Tennyson was much more than a polished mirror of Victorian England. It is easy to catalogue his deficiencies, but it is wiser to enjoy the many things he did superbly. And we should not take shallowness for granted. Beneath the beautiful surfaces there are revelations of the dark abyss in which the poet's deepest self lived. In the essential nature of his idealism and his disillusioned melancholy, his pervading sense of irreparable loss, he is very much our contemporary, the poet of an age of anxiety''.

4

Tennyson As A Lyric Poet

1. **One of the greatest writers of the lyric. The lyrical quality of the poems in the volumes of 1830 and 1833.**
2. **In some of the poems he anticipates Kipling and in some others Walter de la Mare.**
3. **He reached his lyric high-water mark in the songs in "The Princess" and in that surpreme passage which occurs in "Maud".**
4. **The lyrical quality of "A Farewell".**
5. **Magic of music and phrase in "The Lady of Shalott".**
6. **The ampler harmonies of "The Lotos-Eaters".**
7. **The high pathetic vibrations of feeling and the melody in the finest passages of "In Memoriam".**
8. **Hugh Walker's tribute to Tennyson's lyrical genius.**
9. **The exquisite lyrics in "Maud". T.S. Eliot's praise of the lyrical resourcefulness shown in "In Memoriam" and "Maud".**
10. **Tennyson's real power, according to Aubrey de Selincourt, lies in the spell of words and the secret, indefinable beauty of words and tune.**

Tennyson may be regarded as one of the greatest writers of the lyric in the English language. The two early

volumes of poems published in 1830 and 1833 contain the seeds of all that he was to accomplish later. These volumes also contain three or four of the most memorable poems of his life. In the 1830 volume we have *Mariana*, *The Poet*, and *Oriana*. The 1833 volume contains *The Lady of Shalott*, *The Miller's Daughter*, *Oenone*, *The May Queen*, and *The Lotos-Eaters*. *Mariana* which shows the influence of Keats, seems also to anticipate the magical poems of Walter de la Mare. The mingling of the actual and the dream-like in this poem is notable. The inner music of the poem is something new in English lyric verse. It has, over and above its strict accuracy, a lovely slipping of the cadence. The same mixture of texture and technique is found in *Oriana* with the broken repetition of the name. These syllables, so often spoken, so drawing, so retreating in slow ebb, seem to "come upon the silence and die off" :

> I cry aloud : none hears my cries,
>   Oriana
> Thou comest 'tween me and the skies,
>   Oriana
> I feel the tears of blood arise
> Up from my heart unto my eyes,
>   Oriana
> Within thy heart my arrow lies,
>   Oriana

What was hinted and tried in 1830 reaches a superb climax in 1833 with *The Lady of Shalott* which contains everything that the most experienced poet could have learnt—rhyme that flowers from the line like a bud from a rose-bush, scansion that is as sweet as bells but not oversweet, and a sense of beauty pouring in like light through a stained-glass window.

The Poet has enough of phrase-making to make up for the rather dim intellectual content and enough thought to stiffen what might otherwise be a rather limp beauty. The following two lines, important in themselves, indicate the

highest point in this field that Tennyson was destined to reach :

> Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love.

This poem foreshadows those passages in *In Memorian* when the poet is tempering emotion with plausible thought. It is an exposition, not too difficult and with alien colour, of what many may have thought and had wished to say half as well. And in spite of its essential commonplace, it has the vitality born of a hot dream :

> So many minds did gird their orbs with beams,
> Tho' one did fling the fire.
>
> Heaven flow'd upon the soul in many dreams of high desire.
>
> Thus truth was multiplied on truth, the world like one great garden show'd.
>
> And thro' the wreaths of floating dark upcurl'd,
> Rare sunrise flow'd.

In *The Miller's Daughter* and *The May Queen*, the great craftsman experiences and shares the popular taste. In this mood, Tennyson spoke to Kipling across half a century, as he did in another mood to de la Mare. He reverted to it often in his life, as in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and the still more dreadful *Form! Riflemen, Form!* But in Tennyson, as in Kipling, this strain of coarseness only showed that under the genius was the common man.

Oenone and *The Lotos-Eaters* are the first of the poems on classical themes which culminated in the triumphs of *Ulysses* and *Lucretius*. *Oenone* as work of a man under twentyfive, is unbeatable at any age. Tennyson gave to blank verse a new and lovely life two centuries after it had died. If it has a fault, it is in Tennyson's excessive

preoccupation with broad vowel sounds (which became almost a disease in *The Idylls of the King*). Otherwise it has a cadence as deep and slow-swinging as waves in a gentle sea.

Tennyson reached his lyric high-water mark in the songs in *The Princess* and that supreme passage in *Maud* 'XVIII' in which he anticipated half the developments in later verse. The songs in *The Princess* gave him the undisputed title of the monarch of lyric verse. Here are three of the greatest lyrics in the language : *Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white : The splendour falls on castle walls*, and *Tears, idle tears.* The first and the last have tuned blank verse to the fiddle. Here the verse throws off all fetters and soars, dips and rises like the water-cry of the fiddle at the world's end. Skill, colour, beauty, cadence, and the thing beyond all these that attaches to them in the hightest moment of genius are all there :

O hark, O hear ! how thin and clear
And thinner, clearer, farther going !
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing !

(*The splendour falls*)

In the little poem called *A Farewell*, there is much both of the child and of the man : of the child who could never hear the words "*far, far away*" without emotion, and at the same time dwelt with a passion of love upon the familiar things in the country about his home ; and of the man who throughout his life could always turn memory into hunting music, finding with an exquisite sureness of touch the tune to fit the mood. Water he always loved : his poetry is full of it. There was the brook at the bottom of the parson's field, beyond the rectory garden—the swiftly-flowing stream which he never forgot and about which he wrote one of his loveliest lyrics :

A thousand suns will stream on thee,
A thousand moons will quiver :

But not by thee my steps shall be,
For ever and for ever.

And there was the sea, the delight of his boyhood as of his old age, about which he has written more finely and truly than any other English poets except Shakespeare and Swinburne.

Tennyson later was greatly to extend his range and to bring a wider humanity into his poetry; but the fact remains that in the best of his early poems, *The Lady of Shalott*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Ulysses*, and a few small songs like the Owl songs or "A spirit haunts the year's last hours", there is a magic of music and phrase which Tennyson may have afterwards equalled, but certainly never surpassed.

It has been said that in the single composition of *The Lady of Shalott* Tennyson outwrote everything that he had written in the long and painstaking chronicle of *The Idylls of the King*. It need not be asked what is the thought and what the feeling in *The Lady of Shalott*. A.E. Housman, commenting upon one of Shakespeare's songs remarked: "That is nonsense—but it is ravishing poetry". *The Lady of Shalott* is ravishing poetry too—and almost nonsense. Perhaps it suggests to us that it is a bad thing to live among shadows. But we knew this already, and who cares if this poem tells us again or not? The meaning of a song is in the singing. The spell of "*far far away*" had returned from childhood upon Tennyson when he wrote these verses of pure romance, and brought to embellish them the harvest of his dwelling eye, while his inward listening ear caught the very music for his mood.

It is the same with *The Lotos-Eaters*, though this is a poem of ampler harmonies, and in it the luxury of dreaming is stirred by a touch or two from the wings of thought, but only lightly, and the dream is not broken. In no other poem is Tennyson's almost impudent artistry of verbal music more triumphant:

Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes ;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.

The lyrical quality of *In Memoriam* is unquestionable. It is the feelings and the emotions that give to this long poem its true quality. Even the thought-content, whatever of it is there, is given a lyrical character by virtue of the music and melody found in the expression.

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;

. ...

.. ..

Behold, we know not anything ;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

FitzGerald found *In Memoriam* monotonous, but Alfred Lyall rightly points out that the high pathetic vibrations of feeling in the finest passages of this poem prove that the stanza used by Tennyson has wide range and the main current of his meditations passes through many varieties of impressions or aspects of Nature, the dim rainy morning, the short mid-summer night, the bitter wintry day, with moods corresponding to these influences.

Says Hugh Walker, "*In Memoriam* is essentially a lyrical poem and the years immediately before and after its publication are those in which Tennyson's lyrical genius was in fullest flower. *Maud* is a lyrical poem. The beautiful songs interspersed between the parts of *The Princess* belong to this period. The lyrics of these years are on the whole superior both in fervour of passion and in weight of thought to the earlier lyrics. Some of the songs, like "Tears, idle

tears", are, as songs, almost overcharged with thought, yet they are beautifully melodious; and Tennyson never wrote any thing more full of exquisite sound than "The splendour falls on castle walls". The passionate fervour of which Tennyson's lyric strain was capable is best illustrated from *Maud*. In fact the faults of this poem are more than redeemed by such lyric outbursts as "Come into the garden, Maud", and "O that 'twere possible". The first is perhaps the most splendid, as it is one of the most justly popular of all Tennyson's lyrics while the second is among the most exquisite and delicately finished. These pieces have a deeper tone of feeling and more reality of passion than we find in Tennyson's earlier lyrics".

Maud is a narrative poem but the wooing and the winning of the girl, the rapid growth of a mutual passion, the stolen meetings, the plighting of troth, the ecstasy of the lover's adoration, the waiting for her in the garden after a ball, are told in a series of exquisite lyrics, of which a critic says that the English language contains none better than the very best of them. The poem in its development strikes all the lyrical chords, even though all of them may not have been touched with equal skill. They range from melodramatic horror in the opening stanzas to passionate and joyous melodies in the middle part, sinking into a dolorous wail, rising into frenzy and closing with the trumpet note of war. In the beautiful song of rapturous expectation, "Come into the garden, Maud", the poet rises to the highest point of his lyrical verse:

From the meadow your walks have left so sweet
That whenever a March-wind sighs
He sets the jewel-print of your feet
In violets blue as your eyes,
To the woody hollows in which we meet
And the valleys of Paradise.

She is coming, my own, my sweet ;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat ;
Were it earth in an earthy bed ;
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead ;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red.

According to T. S. Eliot, *Maud* and *In Memoriam* are each a series of poems, given form by the greatest lyrical resourcefulness that a poet has ever shown. He points out that *Maud* contains a few very beautiful lyrics such as "O let the solid ground", "Birds in the high Hall garden", "Go not, happy day", around which a more or less dramatic situation has been built with the greatest metrical skill and variety.

It is not for his beliefs that Tennyson has taken his place amongst the English poets ; not for his religious mysticism, his large hearted humanity, his noble ideas of a patriotism and of family life. His real power lies not in the lessons which he teaches. His real power, as of all true poetry, is in something more mysterious than a doctrine, or a set of moral values. It lies, says Aubrey Selincourt, in the spell of words, the secret and indefinable beauty of words and tune. This pure lyrical gift Tennyson possessed in an eminent degree, and it is by virtue of it that he is amongst the great English poets. Most evident in his early work, it continues, though fitfully, right through to the end, a magical utterance, haunting sometimes and apparently as spontaneous as a bird-song, as in *Break, break, break* ; at other times wrought out and meditated with all the cunning of the supreme artificer as in the famous lines which end *Come down, O maid* :

Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
The moan of doves in immemorial elms
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

This mastery of verbal music is characteristic of Tennyson in all his best work ; it is moreover a varied music, for he was almost as cunning a metrist and inventor of tunes as Shelley, as can be seen by a glance at his youthful "girl" poems, his management of the long eight-footers of the two *Locksley Hall* poems or *Vastness*, the grand irregular harmonies of *The Revenge* or the Wellington *Ode*, the wholly original nine-beat couplets of *To Vergil*, the rippling delicacy of the lyrics in *The Brook*, the Horatian dignity and charm of the two lovely poems of invitation, *To F.D. Maurice* and *T. Mary Boyle*. Tennyson kept his lyrical gift right to the end. Less constant than in his youth and middle years, the old music, sometimes in graver harmonies remained upon his lips to the end. *Crossing the Bar*, which he wrote in his eighty-first year is, with the beautiful fidelity and truth of its sea-images, as fine as anything he ever wrote.

Tennyson, as a lyric poet, pure and simple, is among the first in the language even though he does not rank with Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley and Browning.

5

The Elegiac Note in Tennyson

OR

Tennyson As The Poet of Sadness

1. **Tennyson's temperamental melancholy and W.H. Auden's comment.**
2. **The theme of loss appeared early in his verse.**
3. **Solitary figures, frustration, horror, madness, etc. in the 1830 volume of poems.**
4. **Circumstances which deepened his natural melancholy—miseries of childhood, uncertainty of poetic direction, harsh reviews, the death of A.H. Hallam, the spiritual doubts and uncertainties.**
5. **The note of melancholy in "The Vision of Sin".**
6. **The elegiac strain in "Mariana in the Moated Grange," "The Lady of Shalott", "Oenone", "The Palace of Art", "The Lotos-Eaters", "The Two Voices", "Locksley Hall".**
7. **"The Two Voices" and "Locksley Hall" may together be described by the label "Dejection".**
8. **All the anguish of a personal loss and the distress caused by uncertainties of religion find their consummate expression in "In Memoriam".**

9. **"Break, break, break" and "Maud".**

10. **The Ode on Wellington. "The Idylls of the King".**

11. **T.S. Eliot's view.**

12. **"Tears, idle tears".**

13. **His trust in Christianity was shaken by the premature death of Hallam and by the findings of science.**

W.H. Auden, commenting on Tennyson, said : "There was little about melancholia that he (Tennyson) did not know ; there was little else that he did". While the second part of this comment is an unkind cut, the first part emphasizes an essential truth about the poetry of Tennyson. T.S. Eliot called Tennyson "the saddest of all poets". Tennyson's poetry is, indeed, the poetry of sadness. The note of lament, or the elegiac note, is very pronounced in Tennyson's verse. *The Lady of Shalott, Oenone, The Palace of Art, The Lotos-Eaters, Morte d'Arthur, Tithonus, Locksley Hall, The Two Voices, The Vision of Sin, Maud, In Memoriam,* and several shorter pieces amply illustrate this aspect of the Laureate's poetical output. Tennyson's was a temperamental melancholy, fostered and reinforced by his experiences as a child and subsequently by his religious doubts and spiritual uncertainties and by the premature death of A.H. Hallam.

As a child he loved solitude, and in this respect one side of his childhood was not unlike Wordsworth's. A moody and introspective child, he liked to lose himself under the skies, walking all day over the world, or roaming along the coast. Often he would walk all night, hardly conscious of his body, and rapt in the mystery of darkness and starred sky.

The theme of loss appeared very early in Tennyson's poetry. Whenever this theme reappears, even after *In Memoriam,* it works its magic. This fact may explain why Tennyson often seems to force himself to remember the loss

of Hallam, enclosing him in the figure of King Arthur in *The Idylls of the King*, performing again the ritual of loss and recovery in *Vastness*. *In the Valley of Cauteretz*, *Merlin and the Gleam*, and *Crossing the Bar*, and implicitly in many other poems. When the private sensibility was not stirred, the awareness was wanting, and "stupid" "Alfred Lawn Tennyson", the Victorian, wrote masterly bathos.

The finest poems in the first collection, *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), reveal the world of Tennyson's imagination centred upon solitary and isolated figures. the intense and disturbing experiences of melancholy, frustration, horror, madness and death. In these early poems, he is concerned with the evocation of deep moods, morbid states of mind and feeling, rather than the play of ideas which become more prominent in the *Poems* (1833).

Tennyson's home life—centring around a disinherited, embittered and often deranged father—brought upon him, sensitive as he was, acute and prolonged strains. With the father's death, he had to leave Cambridge and steer a numerous and problematical family through difficult waters. His sense of isolation was aggravated by concern about his poetic direction, by harsh reviews, by religious problems, and by the shock of Arthur Hallam's death. Thus, we can, in the main, trace the origins of his "morbid painfulness" back to the family melancholia, to the miseries of his childhood and youth, and to the death of Arthur Hallam. We can follow its manifestations in his behaviour, and its expression in his poetry. We are able to see that he and his writings are of a piece—that his private, interior life, the world he lived in and his art are intimately related. Sometimes this relationship seems to be clearly defined, as in the poems inspired by persons, by well-loved scenes, or special occasions. Sometimes the relationship is mysterious, as in *The Kraken* and many of the lyrics, where we feel a connection without being impelled to define it.

The intense solitude of Tennyson's soul appears abnormal even in a poet. The rhetoric of passion and melancholy

increases with his later years. In *The Vision of Sin*, we see the beginning of that melancholy which gained such hold upon him in later years. His poetic originality of form, his individual imagination and expression, still remain unrecognised by the present age. At his best he is magnificent, and many of his lyrics are flawless; too flawless perhaps for the modern ear. The patient reader alone will discover the underlying despair. His sorrow was the sorrow of a great genius, who, despite the savage attacks of his critics in early life, achieved unique recognition as a poet in England. And yet, though honoured by the Laureateship and a peerage, he did not reach that poetic goal which he set before himself in his *Ulysses*.

The note of pathos and tragedy is very pronounced in most of the poems of Tennyson. The elegiac strain seems to pervade the bulk of his work. A few illustrations would make this point clear.

In *Mariana in the Moated Grange*, we have the mournful aspect of a decaying house in a level waste and the varying moods of despondency of a solitary watcher who looks vainly for some one who never comes :

> She only said, "My life is dreary,
> He cometh not," she said ;
> She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
> I would that I were dead" !

In *The Lady of Shalott*, the atmosphere is sad throughout (excepting a few stanzas), the climax of the tragedy being reached by the Lady's death :

> For ere she reach'd upon the tide
> The first house by the water-side,
> Singing in her song she died,
> The Lady of Shalott.

Oenone too, breathes the spirit of tragedy, reminiscent of *Mariana* :

My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love,
My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim,
And I am all aweary of my life.

In *The Palace of Art*, the soul, after thriving for three years, falls into the slough of despair :

And death and life she hated equally,
And nothing saw, for her despair,
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,
No comfort anywhere.

The mood of distress verging on despair finds a forceful expression in *The Lotos-Eaters* :

Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness !

Here the feeling of despair is given a universal character.

The lament of Tithonus, doomed to immortality and old age, is noteworthy :

Alas ! for this grey shadow, once a man—
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
To his great heart none other than a God !

Locksley Hall depicts a Byronic hero who suffers all the disaffection of earlier Tennysonian protagonists though in the end he yields to a belief in progress. In this poem, we are confronted with the irresolute figure of modern youth, depressed and bewildered by his own inability to face the bustling competition of ordinary English life, disappointed in love, denouncing a shallow-hearted cousin, and nursing a momentary impulse to "wander far away". Restlessness, ennui, impatience of humdrum existence, set him dreaming of something like a new Odysseus. But the hero of this poem is no Ulysses ; the project of wild adventure is abandoned as it is formed.

The Two Voices was originally called *Thoughts of a Suicide* and was begun under the cloud of the over-whelming sorrow of Hallam's death which blotted out all joy from Tennyson's life and made him long for death :

Again the voice spake unto me ;
"Thou art so steep'd misery,
Surely 'twere better not to be''.

We might almost regard *The Two Voices* as continuing in a deeper philosophic key the melancholy musing of *Locksley Hall*, and the two poems might then be labelled "Dejection''. There is similar disconsolate protest against the vanity and emptiness of life ; there is the feeling of doubt and dissolution, the sombre self examination ; and that same vague longing for the battlefield as remedy for the morbid sensibility that haunts so many studious men, which reappears later in *Maud*, even though the poem ends like *In Memoriam*, with a revival of faith and hope under the influences of calm natural beauty, household affections, and the placid ways of ordinary humanity.

But all the anguish of a personal loss and the distress caused by the uncertainties of religion find their consumate expression in the great masterpiece, *In Memoriam* :

Calm and deep peace in this wide air,
These leaves that redden to the fall ;
And in my heart, if calm at all,
If any calm, a calm despair.

... ...

... ...

This year I slept and woke with pain,
I almost wish'd no more to wake,
And that my hold on life would break,
Before I heard those bells again :

... ...

... ...

So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

Break, break, break, written with Hallam in mind, expresses Tennyson's elegiac mood simply but effectively:

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags. O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

We have a short poem of passionate lamentation, which contains the theme upon which *Maud* was afterwards marked out dramatically. The elegiac strain of the following lines is remarkable:

O that 'twere possible
After long grief and pain
To find the arms of my true love
Round me once again.

... ...

... ...

Alas for her that met me,
That heard me softly call,
Came glimmering thro' the laurels,
At the quiet even fall,
In the garden by the turrets
Of the old manorial hall.

The sadness and poignancy of *Maud* are too well-known to need illustration.

Tennyson is the most "occasional" of poets, but the occasions were not public, even when he made them so. His imagination rose only to its own promptings or to the lure of an event that suggested or reproduced the subjective

drama of loss, defeat, and disappointment. Then manner and matter would unite, and even in the placid years he could write the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, of a man who reminded Tennyson of the statesman latent in Arthur Hallam, and *The Idylls of the King*, which broods over the disintegration of an ideal society and the fall of a heroic lay-figure.

James Spedding had remarked in 1835 that his friend Tennyson was "a man always discontented with the Present till it has become the Past, and then he yearns toward it and worships it, and not only worships it, but is discontented because it is past". Many years later, Tennyson himself speaking about *Tears, idle tears*, said, "It is what I have always felt even from a boy, and what as a boy I called the 'passion of the past'. And so it is with me now: it is the distance that charms me in the landscape, the picture and the past, and not immediate today in which I move".

Yet such moods of melancholy, sometimes mellow, sometimes acute, give rise to Tennyson's poetry. T.S. Eliot saw in Tennyson "emotion so deeply suppressed as to tend rather towards the blackest melancholia than towards dramatic action".

The tender melancholy of a feeling that life may be passing without love, of vague regrets and longings, has never been more sympathetically expressed than in the song of "Tears, idle tears", with its refrain of the days that are no more, and the shadow of mortal darkness already falling over the season of youth :

> Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
> The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
> To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
> The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
> So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

How closely the dramatic circumstances of poems like *The Two Voices, Ulysses, Tithonus, Oenone, and Morte*

d'Arthur match his own situation we can see, for example, in the *Morte d'Arthur*, where Hallam's death stands very lightly behind the death of the hero-king, and where Sir Bedivere's questions are his own : What is left in the world when the King is gone ? What hope is there when the fellowship of the Round Table is destroyed ? Arthur's answer is the poet's : Change is inevitable and divinely ordered ; trust in prayer. The King's speech is directed outwards, beyond the dramatic situation, and beyond Tennyson's crisis, to meet the problems of the age. The men of Tennyson's generation were also doubtful of the future ; in mingled expectation and fear they looked forward to the promise of material power and a test of faith. What were to be the guiding values of the future ? To these public questions the *Morte d'Arthur* returns no precise answer, except only a general sense of trust.

But Tennyson's affirmation of trust in the future was not made easily, as we see in *The Two Voices* and in *In Memoriam.* Most seriously of all, Hallam's death shook his religious belief. He was tormented by doubt. How could a God of love allow the death of someone so young, so full of promise, and so good ? If this was the way of God, what kind of God do we worship ? This spiritual crisis exposed the very narrow foundation of his Christianity, of which the cardinal point was the life after death. A recurrent theme in *In Memoriam* is the presence of Hallam ; and here, as in *Ulysses* and in such a late poem as *Vastness*, Tennyson's trust in heavenly life is not communion with God, but the companionship of his friend. Tennyson clung desperately to the hope of personal immortality, so difficult to retain yet so essential to his belief.

His trust in Christianity thus disturbed by Hallam's death, his faith was also exposed to external sources of doubt—the findings of science. Like many of his contemporaries, he found it more and more difficult to reconcile the traditional concept of the Christian God with the scientific view of creation and evolution. The evolutionists suggested that man was not a special creation, but

a supreme animal that had reached its present state by intellectual power and physical aptitude in the battle for survival. By this theory, there was no need to suppose mankind to be the chosen of God. Indeed, it seemed that the creation of the stars, the earth, animal life and their consequent history were in accordance with the operation of certain arbitrary and mechanical laws of nature. In this there was no evidence of moral law. The evolutionary process was the survival of the fittest, the outcome of age-long battle among the species. If the course of Nature involved the profusion of life and its wastage in mass-death, could this be the way of God ? Were God and Nature hostile to each other ? What was the love of God ? How was it shown ? Tennyson wrestled with these problems throughout his life. He kept abreast of scientific advances. He understood their implications, and he knew that his faith called for scrutiny and reestablishment. *In Memoriam* is a record of this struggle. The prefatory lines to *In Memoriam*, written in 1849, are an address to the "Strong Son of God", and assert that his belief in God has survived the assaults of science and of personal tragedy ; that the reconciliation of religious belief and scientific knowledge was effected through faith, and not through logic, or argumentative conviction or factual evidence. Tennyson's trust is staked upon the strength of his love, and its continuance after death. This is a personal position, not a solution. It was reached through his individual journey from a private tragedy. Yet during this trial of faith, Tennyson encountered problems which faced every thinking man of his generation. He was justified in saying that in these elegies it was not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking through him.

"And he was a master in the lyrical expression of a sorrow perhaps more deeply seated than his profoundest personal griefs or religious questionings—a sorrow 'drawn from the depths of some divine despair'. In his verse he has created beauty enough to be beyond fear of the ultimate verdict of posterity".

6

Tennyson's Treatment of Women

1. Two types of women in the poems of the "Fuvenilia"—"the strong woman" and "the suffering woman"

2. Both types appear again in some of the poems of the 1830 volume.

3. These two types of women symbolize the conflict in Tennyson's nature. One side of his nature cried out for sensual indulgence, while the other side tried to frustrate this desire.

4. Poems of the 1833 volume. The Southern Mariana, Oenone, Aphrodite, the soul in "The Palace of Art".

5. Margaret, Rosaland, Kate, Eleanore, etc.

6. Iphigenia, Fephthah's daughter, Helen, Cleopatra in "A Dream of Fair Women". "The Miller's Daughter", "The May Queen", "Fatima".

7. The women in the English idylls in the 1842 volume are for the most part stock characters. Lady Clara. Fatal women in "Tithonus" and "Locksley Hall". Ellen, Dora, Lady Clare, etc. Princess Ida.

8. The influence of Shelley in Tennyson's portrayal of women. The high-born woman in Tennyson's poetry. "The Lady of Shalott", "The Palace of Art", "The Princess", etc.

His treatment of the female is a theme which occurs in Tennyson's early poetry and which is traceable through a good part of his career. In the poem of the *Fuvenilia*, we see for the first time the maidens wh› were to play a large part in his next two volumes of verse. Like the later maidens the ladies in these early poems are primarily of two types. They may be defined as the "strong woman" and the "suffering maiden". The strong woman, who appears most often, is usually fatal to some degree. She rules men and generally causes their destruction. She demands devotion and adoration, but she gives nothing in return. She appears as Cleopatra in *Antony to Cleopatra*, who causes her lover to give up for her sake the world he could rule. She appears as Thais in *Persia*, leading a mob to the palace of Persepolis. She is the dissembling maiden in "Ah ! yes, the lip may faintly smile", who with her withered heart has no consciousness of the ill for which she has been responsible. She is the *femme fatale* in "Did not thy roseate lips outvie", who is proud of the fetters that she has folded "around this fond deluded mind". She is the "half-coquette" in *Lisette*, who with her wilful hands wants only to play at love.

The contrasted type, the suffering maiden, is one who has been ill-treated by the male figure or has in some way been subjected to pain. Berenice in *Mithradates Presenting Berenice with the Cup of Poison*, is a splendid example of this kind of maiden. She is made to drink the poison to save her from shame and the agony of grief. In *A Contrast*. Laura, whose soul is tormented by pangs, is contrasted with the care-free Chloe who can play the game of love without giving her heart. There are other females who closely resemble the suffering maiden. These have died or have been lost for ever. Like the male speaker in most of the early poems, this type of maiden is one whose situation is hopeless, and often her condition is contrasted with that of the speaker. In "And ask you why these sad tears stream ?" and "I wander in darkness and sorrow", the maiden is dead. In *Written By an Exile of Bassorah*, the maiden is separated from the lover

by his exile. In the early poems, there is only one example of a woman who is both attractive and attainable. We meet her in "Thou camest to thy bower, my Love".

From the psychological point of view, it is possible to say that there was definitely a sub-conscious identification of Tennyson with the two types of females presented by him. But the important point is that both types of women are only different manifestations of the male as presented in *Remorse* and *The Outcast*.

These two types of women appear again in some of the poems of the volume that appeared in 1830. The suffering maiden reaches perfection in Mariana. She is the damsel who has been deserted by her lover and who languishes soulfully. Mariana is obviously a maiden of Shelleyian origin, the "high-born maiden" mentioned in *To A Skylark*. The *femme fatale* figure draws her inspiration from Keats, especially from *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. This type is found in Lilian, "cruel little Lilian". She is also found in Madeline who, though perfect in love-lore, refuses to love, and who is a woman of mystery. She appears again in Adeline, who is shadowy and vague, and who has an enigmatic smile. These ladies are presented against a background of Nature in its more dreary aspects which correspond to the sterility of the passion of these ladies.

The suffering maiden and the strong woman—the two types presented by Tennyson, may be taken to symbolise the conflict in his nature. One side of Tennyson's nature cried out for sensual indulgence, while the other side tried to frustrate this desire. Into the figure of the suffering maiden, Tennyson projected that part of his self which had been frustrated in its desire and, therefore, left isolated and deserted. But he projects his other side into the strong, resolute female.

Coming to the *Poems of 1833*, we meet Mariana in the South. This Mariana reminds us of Keats's "beautiful lady

without mercy". Like the knight in Keats's poem, Mariana has been forsaken in love, even though the lover of each had promised to love truly. The Southern Mariana has more force of personality than the first Mariana. This Mariana rebels against her condition, and has even moments of hope. Whether she is to die or whether she will quit her stagnant situation, she now is determined that there will be an end to her suffering. The suffering female will no longer patiently submit to her condition. *Oenone* presents the deserted maiden who in the beginning of the poem is like the motionless females of the 1830 volume, but who in the end determines to act and seek revenge for her sad condition. When Oenone first speaks, we believe that she is merely another Mariana : "My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim/And I am all aweary of my life". Ultimately she does not remain the patient sufferer. She resolves to involve those who have sinned against her in her downfall. She determines to act. Aphrodite in this poem is immediately recognisable as the *femme fatale.* She is the great seductress like Cleopatra in *A Dream of Fair Women.* Aphrodite's offer to Paris is Helen who is another *femme fatale.* Helen is already a loving wife and her beauty will lead to the ugliness of war and death. Aphrodite's is the gift of sensual indulgence, which Paris accepts without hesitation.

The transformation of the suffering maiden as a symbolic figure is apparent in *The Palace of Art.* Here the suffering maiden appears in the guise of the speaker.

Margaret presents a portrait of Adeline's twin sister who, though momentarily sorrowful, suffers only "sorrow's shade". Like her sister *femme fatale*, she is aloof from the world. *In Rosalind* and *Kate*, the maidens become more wilful and dangerous. Rosalind is described as a felcon who goes roaming for prey. Kate is a masculine type who "no common love will feel". The maiden in the sonnet "The form, the form alone is eloquent", (published in 1865 but dating from the period of earlier poems), is the passionless woman :

> The slight coquette, she cannot love,
> And if you kiss'd her feet a thousand years,
> She still would take the praise, and care no more.

These maidens reach their climax in Eleanore. Eleanore cannot partake of man's feelings. She is impervious not only to love's arrows but also to life. She is so withdrawn from reality that she becomes an abstraction. By seeking her out and gazing on her, the speaker feels that he can become somewhat like her—sterile, and lost in contemplation. For Tennyson, Eleanore is *the* fatal woman. She is that powerful figure who traps the minds of all men who gaze on her, but who gives nothing. The resemblance between Eleanore and Keats's "beautiful lady without mercy" is obvious.

A Dream of Fair Woman offers a conscious contrast on the part of the poet between the two types of female. The women whom the traveller sees within the wood are either innocent victims, Iphigenia and Jephthah's daughter, or enchantresses, Helen and Cleopatra. Helen boastfully tells that "where'er I came/I brought calamity". Cleopatra, like earlier Tennysonian fatal women, possessed of a "haughty smile", speaks as the true *femme fatale* :

> I have no men to govern in this wood .
> That makes my only woe.

Iphigenia and Jephthah's daughter are perfect examples of the suffering maiden and perfect examples of contrast to the *femmes fatales*. They have been caused to suffer innocently and they have accepted their plight.

Out of the contrast between these two conflicting feminine types in *A Dream of Fair Women*, there arises a new type of woman in Tennyson's poetry, what Professor Stevenson has called the "matter-of-fact literary stock-character". This new type of female, in a new type of poem, had been foreshadowed in Tennyson's feminine portraits. She appears in *The Miller's Daughter*. The beloved in *The Miller's Daughter*, unlike all other females

of the 1833 poems, is a true lover and faithful wife who has provided the speaker with comfort and settled bliss. For almost the first time in Tennyson's poetry a love affair has proved to be happy, and the poet here begins the first of a series of poems dealing with the joys of domestic life.

The May Queen, on the other hand, presents another kind of female. On the surface, she is a simple village girl but she has something of the *femme fatale* about her.

Eleanore is among the last of Tennyson's fatal women as such. From the fusion of the suffering maiden and the *femme fatale*, a new type of maiden appears. In *Fatima*, the *femme fatale* is somewhat transformed, for she herself has become the pursuer and not the pursued. Fatima is nevertheless the strong woman. She vows, "I *will* possess him or die". In *The Sisters*, the one maiden avenges her dead sister, representative of the suffering maiden, by murdering the deceiving lover ; and strong woman that she is, she feels no remorse for her deed. In *The May Queen*, the proud mistress demands love but refuses to return it. The interesting point about these poems is that while Tennyson was trying to reach a larger audience and, in the case of *The May Queen*, was making his first attempt at stories of common life, the image of the fatal woman kept reappearing. It was as though he could not expel the image from his mind.

Of the new poems in the 1842 volume, almost one-third are idylls, and others, *Locksely Hall* for instance, contain idyllic touches. Many of these poems are pictures of English and country life. Upon the sacredness of home life largely depended, according to Tennyson, the stability and greatness of a nation. Nearly all the idylls have love (true and false) as their subject and women as their principal characters. The women in the idylls are for the most part stock characters and provide little evidence of Tennyson's former preoccupation with the suffering maiden and the *femme fatale*.

Lady Clara Vere de Vere is one of the few poems that even offer a hint of the women such as Cleopatra and Helen in *A Dream of Fair Women.* Haughty and proud, and possessed of the enigmatic smile, Lady Clara is the cruel mistress, the great enchantress who seeks "to break a country heart for pastime". But the fatal woman does not here predominate, for the "I" of the poem reacts with disdain to her enticements. To him there appears to be an unwholesomeness about her. He admonishes her to cease her idle snares and devote herself to social-welfare work. The poem marks, therefore, a turning-point in the development of Tennyson's psychology. The bewitching female is no longer the enchanting beautiful lady without pity, who captivates all men. Now she has become the dread Scylla who lures the unwary to death, and she is recognised as such by the speaker. There is no essential physical or psychological difference between Lady Clara and the earlier fatal women in Tennyson. She is, like them, proud, enigmatic and cruel ; but unlike them she is not irresistible. The difference lies in the speaker's reaction to her.

There are hints of the fatal women in *Tithonus* and *Locksley Hall.* Eos holds Tithonus in her arms and will not let him go. But the speaker realises that the gods cannot withdraw their gifts and that Eos may be an unwilling captivator. In *Locksley Hall,* the speaker is obsessed by Amy, and he calls her shallow-hearted. But he is aware that her cruel desertion of him was the result more of her parents' demand than of her own will. In the end, however, he is able to free himself of his obsession with her and to turn his thoughts elsewhere.

The fatal female is chastened further in the Conclusion to *The May Queen.* There had been suggestions of the fatal woman in the maiden who was to be the Queen of May, but in the Conclusion she becomes a good bit like the suffering maiden of *Mariana.* The same change occurs in her as in the male speakers of *The Two Voices* and *Locksley Hall* : from pre-occupation with self she moves to sympathy with Nature and mankind.

The maidens of the 1842 volume seem to have far more in common with the Marianas of the early poems than with the Cleopatras. In *Edward Gray*, the speaker relates that he loved Ellen who against her parents' will returned his love. She was, however, shy and he took her shyness for coldness and haughtiness. To escape her, he fled over the sea and tried to forget her. But Ellen was not the coquette that he took her for ; and so pining for him she dies. Here we see how Tennyson has taken elements from his earlier two types of females and merged them. The speaker suspects her of being a fatal woman but she turns out to be the suffering maiden who is deserted by her lover.

Dora gives us another maiden who in spite of adversity proves true to her cousin-lover, a favourite figure in Tennyson and, indeed, in a large body of Victorian literature. Dora, who lives with her uncle, loves her cousin William, and the uncle orders his son to marry her. William, however, refuses to submit to the tyrannical father and goes off to marry another girl by whom he has a child. William falls on hard times and soon dies, leaving his family destitute. During all this time Dora remains true.

Lady Clare, *The Lord Burleigh*, and *The Beggar Maid* introduce us to lovers who love either below or above their station. Lady Clare learns that she is not of noble birth, but Lord Ronald loves her all the same. The Lord of Burleigh pretends to a village maiden that he is only a landscape painter and marries her ; but he takes her to Burleigh House to live as his Countess, a life in which till her death she always feels out of place. King Cophatua is captivated by the beggar maid and vows to make her his queen. All these poems seem to be based on the belief expressed in *Lady Clara Vere de Vere* that "A simple maiden in her flower/Is worth a hundred coats-of-arms".

Out of the contrasting protraits of fatal females and suffering maidens there arose, as in the idylls, the maiden who was neither one nor the other but who represented an

ideal of womanhood. Princess Ida herself approximates to the development of the fatal female. She closely resembles Tennyson's previous strong women. But she is not the only fatal female in *The Princess.* The first mention of such a woman comes in the Prologue in reference to the Lady who would not submit to the wild King and who drove her foes from her walls. Lilia is a budding fatal woman. In the end, of course, Ida as a fatal woman is chastened ; for, as was the case with Tennyson's previous strong women, she is conquered by love. In the end, therefore, Ida turns out to be like the maidens of *The Gardener's Daughter* and *The Miller's Daughter,* women who achieve happiness through conjugal love.

According to a critic (Lionel Stevenson), Tennyson, in his portrayal of women, was unmistakablv influenced by Shelley. One particular specimen of this influence is to be found in a stanza from Shelley's *To A Skylark* :

> Like a high-born maiden
> In a palace-tower,
> Soothing her love-laden
> Soul in secret hour
> With music sweet as love, with overflows her
> bower...

The concept of the imprisoned or otherwise isolated maiden, described in these lines, pervades the poetry of Shelley. It is vividly employed in *The Revolt of Islam* and it appears in *The Witch of Atlas.* Echoes of these poems are to be found in the many passages in which Tennyson deals with the image of an isolated and unhappy maiden who makes her first appearance in the poem *Mariana,* though the immediate inspiration for the poem was not Shelleyan. Two years after the publication of *Mariana,* Tennyson's next book of poems contained *Mariana in the South,* a companion piece. The two *Mariana* poems were merely studies in mood and scene. When the lady next appeared in a poem, she had acquired a new literary source, a more detailed story, and a distinct symbolic meaning. This poem was *The Lady of*

Shalott. The lady in this poem originated from Tennyson's Arthurian studies which introduced him to a maiden "in a palace-tower soothing her love-laden" soul in secret bower. The lady of Shalott is an artist, weaving beautiful pictures which are supposed to reproduce real life but which are derived entirely at second-hand through the mirror. At the beginning of the poem she is perfectly happy with her artificial, lifeless creations. When she catches a first glimpse of real emotion, she suddenly begins to rebel, crying out, "I am half sick of shadows!" As soon as an emotion touches her personally through her interest in Launcelot, she defies the curse, and enjoys her brief hour of genuine life, even though she knows it will be her last. The personal application of this situation to Tennyson is obvious. Like the lady of Shalott, he was deciding to discard all his previous serene creations and to face the painful experiences of real life.

A remarkable treatment of the theme occurs in *The Palace of Art*. Personifying his soul as a beautiful and arrogant woman, the poet tells how he built for her a palace on the top of a mountain, where she dwelt in complete solitude. From the windows the self-sufficient soul can look down contemptuously upon the primitive struggles of everyday life. The soul enjoys her solitary complacency for three years, and then falls into an agony of loneliness. Finally she realises that her only salvation is to discard her royal robes and retire to a cottage in the valley to practise penitence. In the final stanza, she announces her hope that when she has purged her guilt she may return to the beautiful palace and bring companions with her. Tennyson's use of the high-born maiden symbol assumes a significant new implication in this poem. She is no longer a pathetic, deserted creature who is the victim of external oppression, but a hard, arrogant egotist who chooses isolation and whose eventual misery is due to her divorce from all human sympathy.

In *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, Tennyson moves from

allegory to objective portraiture. This poem shows Tennyson's new determination to write about the actual affairs of human experience. This is clear from the advice to Clara to undertake social service work.

Having thus transferred his high born maiden from the cloudy regions of legend and allegory to the noon-day of contemporary England, Tennyson varies her portrait in several other poems. In *Locksley Hall*, she is Amy, no longer coldly proud, but merely weak enough to sacrifice love in exchange for wealth and social prestige at the insistence of her parents. In *Maud*, she becomes still less aloof because she has been brought up amid wealth and flattery. At the beginning of the poem her moody admirer assumes that she will be cold and selfish ; but Maud proves sincere enough to defy the family grandeur and to love her penniless lover.

The image of the high born maiden occurs also in *The Princess*, here multiplied into a whole institution—full of high-born maidens. The barrier of intellectual arrogance is this time broken down by love and all the demands of practical life. A playfull variation of the same plot is provided in *The Day Dream*, which re-tells the story of the Sleeping Beauty. Lionel Stevenson then goes on to suggest a psychological interpretation of the long persistence of the high-born maiden in Tennyson's poetry.

7

Tennyson As An Artist

OR

Tennyson's Craftsmanship

1. **As Cazamian says, Tennyson deliberately emphasizes the importance of discipline in the form of poetry.**
2. **But the instinct of sobriety in him is continually assailed by contrary tendencies.**
3. **A common feature of all his early poems is a "caressing music of the melody" and an unerring felicity in the metrical translation of feelings.**
4. **He shows a wide range of manner as well as of theme.**
5. **The unity and completeness of his short poems—"Ulysses", "St. Simeon Stylites", "The Two Voices", "The Vision of Sin" and even "The Palace of Art".**
6. **The art of construction in "The Lotos-Eaters".**
7. **Felicity of diction, pictorial richness, apt similes, etc.**
8. **Repetition of words and repetition of sounds. Alliteration and onomatopoeia.**
9. **Accurate descriptions.**

10. **The metrical variety of his poems. The success of his blank verse.**

11. **An undue striving after style assumes the character of a mannerism.**

12. **He often exalts diction at the expense of directness and simplicity. The servant, not the master, of the music of words.**

13. **The lusciousness of his style discredited him in the eyes of post-Victorian critics.**

Says Cazamian : "While Romanticism had tended rather to lay stress on spontaneity of feeling, Tennyson deliberately emphasises the importance of discipline in form. He is an indefatigable, conscientious, and meticulous artist. His poems after going through successive revisions are sometimes hardly recognisable, and almost always closer to perfection. He is aware of the fact that in this endeavour lies the principle of a fruitful departure ; and that the preceding generation, however inspired it may have been, did not aim at the strictly condensed expression which could have contained the enthusiasm of its lyrical outbursts. After the lapse of two centuries, he again experienced, next to an age of self-outpouring and passion, that need for balance, for a fine and compact aptness of phrase, which poets like Waller and Dryden had felt. As the heir of Romantic tradition, he completes and corrects it by incorporating with it the essential tenets of classicism.

"But, however much the moral needs behind his literary technique may resemble the opinions and preferences which, in classical times, inspired the taste for a sober type of beauty, Tennyson does not possess the instinct of sobriety ; or rather, it does not dominate his art, but is continually assailed by contrary tendencies. He is a poet who has learned from the Romantics the sense and value of "intensity ; but..........he hardly can be" intense... ....And thus intensity with him, through the very process of its realisation, is weakened".

"His early poems show him to be a master in a facile, graceful, and harmonious key......In these first efforts he deals in word-painting and delightful harmonies ; he shows exquisite feeling for the music of syllables and the charm of imagery. In some of the poems, one can feel suggestions for Shelley, Keats or Coleridge. In others we catch .... a temperament that, beneath the outward show of a well-balanced art, strives to conceal the feverish agitation of an almost morbid mind. But a common feature of all the poems is that caressing music of the melody, that unerring felicity in the metrical translation of feelings, which are a contribution worthy of the most talented artists".

Tennyson's first volumes had linked him in the eyes of critics with the Keatsian tradition. In 1846 hostile criticism was summed up in Bulwer-Lytton's lines about "School-Miss Alfred" and his

> Jingling medley of purloin'd conceits,
> Outbabying Wordsworth, and outglittering Keats.

There is between Keats and Tennyson the obvious affinity in pictorial richness. Yet we cannot simply describe Tennyson's style as "ornate". He has indeed, many styles. Perhaps no other poet of the time showed such a variety of manner as well as of theme—"from the delicate, hovering elusiveness of *The Hesperides* to the ultra-Wordsworthian and biblical plainness of *Dora*, from the primitive vitality of *The Kraken* to the gnomic political poems, from the sensuous concreteness of *Early Spring* to the metaphysical abstractions of *The Higher Pantheism*, from the elegiac nostalgia of many lyrics to the semi-Horatian addresses to friends, from the gorgeous felicity of the classical poems to the earthy felicity of the *Northern Farmer*, from the romantic realism of *Mariana* to the macabre realism of *Rizpah*, from the painful wrestling of *The Two Voices* to the quiet assurance of *The Ancient Sage*, from the purely lyrical to the philosophical poems of *In Memoriam*, from the heroic stateliness of the *Ode* on Wellington to the heroic balladry of *The Revenge*, from the ecstasies and hysterics of *Maud* to

the ecstasies and hysterics of *The Holy Grail*" (Douglas Bush).

A marked feature of the poems of 1842 is their unity and completeness. "Every short poem", said Tennyson, "should have a definite shape, like the curve, sometimes a single, sometimes a double one, assumed by a severed tress or the rind of an apple when flung on the floor". It is doubtful whether Tennyson ever well understood the building up of long poems. But he was extremely skilful in the construction of short pieces, and after 1832 he studied the art with the greatest care. The lighter pieces from the beginning, and from 1832 onwards the weightier ones as well, owe a great deal of their charm to the unity of impression which they convey. Always a poet of the fitting word and the exquisite phrase, Tennyson in his maturity never forgot the importance of the setting. Thus *Ulysses* is the round and flawless delineation of the stoical mind, "strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield". Few, if any, poems of equal length contain a greater number of gems of expression. It is absolutely free from anything that could be wished away, and to add anything to it would be "wasteful and ridiculous excess". *St. Simeon Stylites* is a poem of a lower order; yet it is almost equally perfect in its own way as a picture of the diseased asceticism of the early saint. Again, *The Two Voices* and *The Vision of Sin* have the unity which belongs to a mental state vividly conceived. In *The Palace of Art*, there is greater complexity; but there is a unity no less real. Perhaps the only important poem of 1842 which has not his convincing completeness is *A Dream of Fair Women.*

But the best proof of the great advance which Tennyson had made in the art of construction is to be found in *The Lotos-Eaters*, a piece which can hardly be paralleled except in Spenser or in Thomson's *Castle of Indolence.* It is the poem of sensuous indulgence and enjoyment. In the land of the lotos-eaters it seems "always afternoon". Work is hateful; "dreamful ease" is the only object of desire. Nay, so deep a drowsiness broods over the land that desire

itself is a word too suggestive of action and effort to be appropriate.

Tennyson is a consummate artist. His artistry or craftsmanship is one of the principal grounds of his poetic greatness. The excellence of his workmanship has been universally admired. He spent the greatest possible labour upon the writing of his poems. Like Keats he revised and re-touched his poems in order to polish them and give them a perfect finish. Unlike Browning, he selected his words with great care and observed all the rules of grammar and punctuation. He employed all the poetic ornaments to enrich and decorate his poetry.

Among the elements of his power as an artist may be mentioned (*a*) felicity of diction; (*b*) sound and word-pictures; (*c*) verbal music; (*d*) picturesque and apt similes; and (*e*) absence of obscurity.

(*a*) **Felicity of diction.** Tennyson used the right words in the right places. His words perfectly suit the occasion. His phrases are happily chosen. "Nature red in tooth and claw"; "I will drink life to the lees"; "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield"; "how dull it is to pause, to make an end, to rust unburnished, not to shine in use"— these illustrate the point. The felicitous use of words may also be noted in the following lines from *Tithonus*:

> Ay me! ay me! with what another heart
> In days far-off, and with what other eyes
> I used to watch—if I be he that watch'd—
> The lucid outline forming round thee; saw
> The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;
> Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood
> Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all
> Thy presence...........

and in the following lines from *The Palace of Art*, where the desolate soul is compared to

A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand ;
Left on the shore, that hears all night
The plunging seas draw backward from the land
Their moon-led waters white.

(*b*) **Imagery**. Tennyson is one of the best word-painters. His pictures are remarkable for their vividness. The following images in *The Lady of Shalott* are notable :

There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

and

For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and knights
And music, went to Camelot :
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed.

In *The Lotos-Eaters*, we have a remarkable picture of the misfortunes and disasters that afflict mankind :

Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.

The atmosphere of drowsiness and languor is admirably built in this poem by means of number of word-pictures.

(*c*) **Music, melody, rhythmic harmonies in his poetry**. A sense of music governs the style of Tennyson's versification. "He has carried the art of metrical construction to a height of perfection never before attempted in English poetry. It is difficult to find a false rhyme, a slovenly stanza or a halting metre, in all the great bulk of his completed works". The musical effect is produced by him by his mastery over metres and by the aid of various devices like repetition of words, alliteration, assonance, use of

melodious vowels and liquid consonants. His use of assonance and his choice of melodious vowels and liquid consonants are seen in the following lines :

> All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone
> Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone.
> (*The Lotos-Eaters*)

Here the repetition of the "o" sound in low, mellow, tone, hollow, and lone, is to be noted. The repetition of the liquid consonants l, m and n also occurs here.)
Again :

> To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
>
> To the influence of mild-minded melancholy
> (*The Lotos-Eaters*)

Examples of alliteration in his poetry are numerous :

(*i*) Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.

(*ii*) Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.

(*iii*) Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.
(From *The Lotos-Eaters*)

(*iv*) Chanted loudly, chanted lowly.
(*v*) The bridal bells rang merrily.

(*vi*) Burn'd like one burning flame together.
(From the *Lady of Shalott*)

(*d*) Tennyson's similes are beautiful and picturesque. There are some lovely similes in *The Lady of Shalott*.

(*e*) Finally, Tennyson's poetry does not suffer from the fatal defect which spoils Browning's work. There is no obscurity in Tennyson's poems which are easily intelligible and which yield their meaning at the very first reading.

One of the leading characteristics of Tennyson's style is the repetition of a word (often in modified form) in the

same or sometimes in a slightly different sense. In *Guinevere*, we have the following example :

> Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hand,
> Shame on her own *garrulity garrulously*

and, again, in the same poem :

> The *maiden* passion for a *maid*

The following are more examples of repetition :

> For ever *climbing* up the *climbing* wave
> (*The Lotos-Eaters*)

> *Mouldering* with the dull earth's *mouldering* sod
> (*The Palace of Art*)

In *The Passing of Arthur*, there are recurring phrases when the poet describes the three-fold journey of Sir Bedivere.

In the following examples, the repetition is an echoing of words, akin to the parallelism of Bible verse :

(*a*) Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine the lily maid of Astolat.

(*b*) Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes.

(*c*) The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades and falls...........

His repetition is at its simplest in the refrain based upon the lucky jingle of Camelot-Shalott-Lancelot. Sometimes, as in *Oenone*, it seems to be an inherent part of the structure. The theme and the very atmosphere of the poem depend upon the repeated prayer :

> O mother Ida, many fountain'd Ida,
> Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.

Assonance—the repetition not of a word but of a sound—is also a favourite device with Tennyson :

Even to *tipmost* lawns and *topmost* helm
(*The Last Tournament*)

Thy Paynin bard
Had such a *mastery* of his *mystery*
That he could harp his wife up out of hell.
(*The Last Tournament*)

Then with that friendly-fiendly smile of his
(*Harold*)

His sense of music is equally to be found in the melody of his diction. The mere sound of his words and phrases lingers in the mind, apart from any meaning. This is chiefly due to his selection of melodious vowels and liquid consonants, and also to his skilful use of alliteration :

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees (*The Princess*)

The lustre of the long convolvuluses (*Enoch Arden*)
The long low dune and lazy plunging sea
(*The Last Tournament*)

Breast-high in that bright light of bracken stood.
(*Pelleas and Etarre*)

All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone
Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone
(*The Lotos-Eaters*)

No poet has used the twin devices of alliteration and onomatopoeia to such effect. The harmonising of vowels and consonants to his sense is, indeed, not a mere ornament but an essential element of his work. Sometimes the effect is simple, and depends mainly upon the recurrence of a liquid consonant sound :

Mournful Oenone wandering forlorn.

Another line in the same poem describes the downward rushing of water by a rhythmic device :

The long brook falling thro' clov'n ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.

It is the sound more than the actual description that brings before our minds the traffic, now heavy and slow, now light and fast, on the river down to Camelot :

By the margin willow-veil'd
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses ; and un-hail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd.

It is easy to recognise in *The Lotos-Eaters* how Tennyson could suit his rhythms to his theme. After the even, dignified flow of the opening stanzas, with their carefully interlinked rhymes, there follow the changing measures of the Choric Song. Long line alternates with short line. The solemn stresses of

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass

give way to the quicker lilt of

Lo ! in the middle of the wood
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud,
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care ;

and again to the rollicking

We have had enough of action, and of motion we,
Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was seething free.

His work is essentially picturesque, in the sense that he could use words as the painter uses his brush for conveying the impression of a scene's true outline and

colour. The fragment, written on revisiting *Mablethorpe*, contains the quintessence of his descriptive style; the last three lines are sheer landscape-painting :

> The drain-cut level of the marshy lea,
> Grey sand banks, and pale sunsets. dreary wind,
> Dim shores, dense rains and heavy-clouded sea.

So also in *The Palace of Art* the desolate soul is compared to

> A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand;
> Left on the shore; that hears all night
> The plunging seas draw backward from the land
> Their moon-led waters white.

Here every word is like a stroke of the painter's brush, put in to complete the sketch and to round off the impression, and this is characteristic of all Tennyson's workmanship. He does not give the effect of the scene, but the scene itself.

We are made to see St. Simeon Stylites, the type of wild Oriental asceticism, praying from the top of his pillar amid rain, wind, and frost; "from scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin", "Battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer". Here the poet has leapt into the Egyptian desert to give us a picture of suicidal misery and fierce mortification of the senses.

The picturesqueness, the elaborate aptness, and the individual and personal character of Tennyson's similes are noteworthy. The following are examples of their picturesque aptness :

> The great brand
> Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
> And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
> Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
> Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
> By night, with noises of the northern sea.
> (*Morte d'Arthur*)

Dust are our frames; and, guilded dust, our pride
Looks only for a moment whole and sound;
Like that long-buried body of the king,
Found lying with his urns and ornaments,
Which at a touch of light, an air of heaven,
Slipt into ashes, and was found no more.
(*Aylmer's Field*)

His similes in many cases do not so much appeal to common experience, as bring before us some special thing or some peculiar aspect of Nature, which the poet has vividly presented to his own mind, while to the reader perhaps the picture suggested may be quite unfamiliar. The following is an example:

So now that shadow of mischance appear'd
No graver than as when some little cloud
Cuts off the fiery highway of the sun,
And isles a light in the offing
(*Enoch Arden*)

His similes are not so much the long-developed Homeric figures, in which Matthew Arnold delighted, as the perfectly wrought pictures of Virgil. The following occurs at the end of *The Passing of Arthur*:

and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Rufles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood,
With swarthy webs.

The metrical variety of his poems, his experiments in classical prosody, and his development of the resources of the language for harmony are noteworthy. His power of smoothing down linguistic harshness and difficulties were remarkable; and he possessed great skill in the arrangement of words to connote physical sensations. His command over the long, flowing line, which no poet before him had used so

frequently, give it the flexibilty that served him well in such pieces as *The Northern Farmer,* where the broad dialect required free play ; which in other poems he could give this metre the sounding roll of a chant or a chorus. On the instrumental resources of blank verse he sets the highest value. He had his own secrets of arranging and diversifying it ; and all those who have used it after him have profited by his lessons in this essentially English metre.

There is seldom anything but complete success in the blank verse of most of the classical poems and the almost infinite variety of lyric measures (which include blank verse). Within the limits of his versatile powers, he exploited to the utmost the resources of the language and of his almost too sensitive ear. He was widely and deeply concerned with problems of craftsmanship, and his range of experimentation included everything from a whole work like *Maud* to the management of pauses or the letter "s".

"The savour of the artificial, the superiority of ornamental effects, of a highly finished form, of a fastidious exclusiveness, as against the originality of thought, all introduce the subtle aroma of decadence into his poetry, supremely refined and impeccable as it is. Whole sections of his work are marred by this undue striving after style, which he vainly strains his almost unerring tact to hide, and which, with the lapse of time, already assumes the character of a mannerism. Other parts are more relatively free from it, and it would be easy to exaggerate this superficial weakness. The reaction of our age against the age that went before has brought with it a disparagement of Tennyson which is very probably too severe. His art retains a sufficient sincerity of tone, it is supported by a sufficiently vigorous truth of feeling, to render acceptable the elaborate elegance of his style. His work as a whole will assuredly keep its appeal, and not be relegated to the class of writings with a refined but ephemeral brilliance". (*Cazamian*)

He was often incapable of expressing the familiar and the concrete in language that was simple and unadorned. His poems often tended to have a beauty like Maud's :

> Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
> Dead perfection, no more.

Ornate expression was in Tennyson the natural outcome of his genius. But the decoration sometimes becomes mere tinsel. When he writes in *The Passing of Arthur* of King Arthur's curls clotted with blood:

> Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips

he absurdly exalts the diction at the expense of directness and simplicity. Even Carlyle, his loyal and admiring friend, talked of "Alfred's jingle", hinting that he was sometimes the servant and not the master of the music of words. He had to pay the price for his artistry, as Wordsworth did for his simplicity, and Browning for the dynamic onrush of his thought.

There is a lusciousness in Tennyson's style, a sweetness that more than anything else discredited his work in the eyes of post-Victorian critics. "Lawn Tennyson he has jocularly been called with reference to that patient cultivation which gives to his poetry the well ordered beauty of a garden rather than the untrimmed loveliness of Nature. But it would be remembered, as Drinkwater says, that his progress in poetry was towards economy of effect ; that the decorative art of *The Lady of Shalott* became after many years the simplicity of *Crossing the Bar*. In fact the simplicity was always present. Even at the end of *The Lady of Shalott*, this simplicity appears in what is, after all, the most moving passage of the poem :

> But Lancelot mused a little space,
> He said, "She has a lovely face ;
> God in His mercy lend her grace,
> The Lady of Shalott".

Ulysses, a comparatively early poem, is as direct and virile as anything Tennyson ever wrote ; and even *Morte d'Arthur* is as memorable for its restraint as for its perfection of ornament.

8

Tennyson's Treatment of Nature

1. His attitude to Nature may be differentiated from that of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron.

2. In his treatment of Nature, he was influenced by the scientific discoveries of his time. Yet even he found consolation in the beauty of Nature.

3. Nature to him was a process of law. In all the workings of Nature, he traces the evolution of the great designs of God.

4. He was aware of the waste and cruelty in Nature—Nature, red in tooth and claw.

5. The scientific accuracy of his observation of natural phenomena. Illustrations of his minute observation and vivid painting.

6. Sometimes he gives us scenes of savage grandeur but he often describes quiet English land-scapes.

7. In Tennyson's Nature-imagery lies his chief claim to immortality, says F.L. Lucas.

8. His vivid sea-scapes.

9. He often describes a human mood in terms of natural phenomena (as in "The Lotos-Eaters", "The Lady of Shalott" "In Memoriam", and "Maud)".

The first point to note about Tennyson in this respect is that he does not consider Nature to be a living presence.

He does not perceive any divine spirit in Nature as Wordsworth did, nor the Spirit of Love in Nature as Shelley did. He does not advocate a "spiritual communion with Nature as both Wordsworth, and Shelley" do, and he does not dwell upon the moral and educative influence of Nature as Wordsworth so ardently does. He does not, like Coleridge under the influence of Wordsworth, interpret the voice of Nature as the language of God ; nor does he, like Coleridge, show any particular preference for the unusual and remote phenomena of Nature. He does not treat Nature as a refuge from the society of man, as Byron. And he does not, like Keats and Shelley, possess the myth-making faculty with regard to the forces of Nature.

If we compare Tennyson with Wordsworth, we are at once aware of a marked difference in their treatment of Nature. Wordsworth dwells mainly upon her calm, majestic, and kindly aspects ; she is the homely nurse who endeavours to content the immortal soul of imperial man with his humble abode on earth ; she is beautiful and beneficent ; she "lifts the spirit to a calmer height" ; and although Wordsworth may be occasionally touched by her insensibility to human sorrow, may be perplexed by finding her ways unintelligible, yet he discerns everywhere the interfusion of a divine spirit, and the evidences of an admirable arrangement and design. For Tennyson also the external world was sublime and beautiful, soothing his regrets and suggesting resignation to the common lot, but the illimitable expansion of time and space laid open by scientific discoveries, the record of waste and prodigality through countless ages, the disclosure of the processes of Nature, her impassive uniformity, her implacable regularity, took strong hold of an imaginative mind that was in communion with the thought and knowledge of the day. Nevertheless her (Nature's) face, as he sees it, is so fair that it brings him consolation. The alterations of the seasons, the storm and sunshine, are reflected in his varying moods ; the spring breezes carry cheerful message ; the autumnal gales accord with the unrest of his mind ; a quite sea turns his thoughts to the calm of death. He feels the

immemorial touch of sadness in the brief lifetime of flower and foliage, in the passing of the long light summer days... 'Characteristic of Tennyson's view of Nature are the closing lines of *The Two Voices* where the poet feels that Nature's living motion lent/The pulse of hope to discontent''. Pacing along in the midst of Nature, the poet feel that

> The woods were fill'd so full with song,
> There seem'd no room for sense of wrong.

To Tennyson, Nature was a process of Law, including both love and thought. Even in the midst of his mourning over the seeming waste involved in the early death of his friend, he can write in *In Memoriam*.

> I curse not nature, no, nor death ;
> For nothing is that errs from law.

In all the working of Nature, he traces the evolution of the great designs of God :

> That God, which ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves.

In *The Higher Pantheism*, a similar thought is expressed :

> God is law, say the wise : O soul, and let us rejoice,
> For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His voice.

But we must not shut our eyes to another effect of scientific thought upon the mind of Tennyson *vis-a-vis* his outlook on Nature. Scientific thinking made Tennyson aware of the cruelty and waste in Nature. Nature is "red in tooth and claw'' ; Nature "lends such evil dreams'' ; Nature seems to be at strife with God ; Nature cares neither for the single life nor yet for the type. In the eighteenth century at

Cambridge, Arch-Deacon Paley had exclaimed: "It is a happy world after all. The air, the earth, the water teem with delighted existence". But Tennyson had different thoughts when he looked at Nature:

> For Nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal:
>
> The Mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd by the shrike,
>
> And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder and prey (*Maud*, Part I (*iv*))

The thought in these lines is an expansion of the famous phrase in *In Memoriam*: "Nature, red in tooth and claw". What conclusion can the moralist draw from this side of Nature? He cannot do much more than ask the question: "Are God and Nature then at strife"? For unless one admits the possibility of a God who is somehow not in full control of the matter, one is left with unwelcome choices: *either* God is not good; *or*, He is impersonal and quite apart from a world created experimentally; *or* He does not exist.

The distinguishing feature of Tennyson's attitude to Nature is the scientific accuracy of his observation. His pictures of Nature are drawn from actual observation. Once he asked Miss Thackery, "to notice whether the skylark did not come down sideways on the wing". This is indicative of his habit to observe closely, minutely and accurately. His poetry always surprises us by the "vivid accuracy of his description". We often say reading his natural descriptions, "that is so; I have noticed it myself". Examples of his minuteness of detail and accuracy of observation of Nature may be found even in his imaginative poem, *The Lady of Shalott*:

> Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
> Little breezes dusk and shiver...

and again :

> In the stormy east-wind straining
> The pale yellow woods were waning,
> The broad stream in his banks complaining,
> Heavily the low sky raining...

For minute observation and vivid painting of the details of natural scenery, Tennyson has not been equalled. The following are examples of his tree-studies :

> hair,
> In gloss and hue chestnut, when the shell
> Divides three-fold to show the fruit within
> (*The Brook*)

> those eyes
> Darker than darkest pansies, and that hair
> More black than ash-buds in the front of March
> (*The Gardener's Daughter*)

> With blasts that blow the poplar white
> (*In Memoriam*)

> A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime
> (*Maud*)

> A stump of oak half-dead,
> From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,
> Clutch'd at the crag (*The Last Tournament*)

Sometimes he gives us scenes of savage grandeur, as in

> The monstrous ledges slope and spill
> Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,

But the oftener describes quiet English landscapes, the "haunts of ancient peace", with "plaited alleys" and

"terrace lawn", "long grey fields", "tracts of pasture sunny-warm", and all the ordered quiet of rural life.

Tennyson's singular skill in briefly sketching broad landscapes is seen in the following lines :

As the crest of some slow-arching wave,
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,
Drops flat, and after the great waters break
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud.
(*The Last Tournament*)

Or a single line may be the setting of a picture, as in

The long low dune and lazy plunging sea.

In *The Passing of Arthur*, the poet shows his power of fixing by a few strokes the impression of a desolate wilderness bounded by the sky-lines of mountain and sea.

F. L. Lucas sees in Tennyson's Nature-imagery the poet's chief claim to immortality. He sees in Tennyson a "reed shaken by the wind", as they shake in the lovely desolation of *The Dying Swan* :

Ever the weary wind went on,
And took the reed-tops as it went,

Emphasizing Tennyson's capacity and power to render natural phenomena in poetry, Lucas refers to the sunrise across the eastern sea in *Love and Duty* ; the tall, moon-silvered pine-trees that Paris felled for his galleys in *Oenone* ; the dawn wind sycamore, chestnuts pattering through brown October leaves, rooks blown about the skies of the breaking year, the lark dwindling to a "sightless song"—all in *In Memoriam* ; the splendours of the dragon-fly in its panoply of sapphire mail in *The Two Voices*, etc. "From *Claribel* to *Crossing the Bar*", says Lucas, "it is always the same story—it is not for dead woman or mystic Pilot that

we care, but for the wild bee's humming, and the beetle's booming, and for that tide 'too full for sound and foam' ". No English poet has given us better pictures of the sea-scape :

> We have had enough of action, and of motion we,
> Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was seething free,
> Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea.
> (*The Lotos-Eaters*)

> But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
> Too full for sound and foam,
> When that which drew from out the boundless deep
> Turns again home. (*Crossing the Bar*)

> There gloom the dark broad seas... ..
> .... the deep
> Moans round with many voices. (*Ulysses*)

In addition to this, Tennyson believed with Coleridge that we interpret Nature according to our own moods. Nature is happy or otherwise according as our own heart is happy or otherwise. This often led Tennyson to describe a human mood in terms of natural phenomena. This is best illustrated in *The Lotos-Eaters* where the mood of indolence of the sailors is elaborated in terms of the objects of Nature. We are told that it was a land where all things always remained the same, where the sun was too lazy to set, where the lazy air appeared to swoon, where the streams seemed to fall and pause and fall, and so on. The languor and laziness of the sailors in this poem find their correspondence in the languor and laziness of the wind, the sun, the streams, etc. In *The Lady of Shalott*, a storm begins to blow when the curse descends upon the Lady ; which means that here also Nature is shown as sympathising with the mood and state of human beings. In *In Memoriam*, all natural things that catch the poet's eye or ear remind him,

by contrast or sympathy, of his bereavement, and interpret his personal emotion :

> Calm and deep peace in this wide air,
> These leaves that redden to the fall,
> And in my heart, if calm at all,
> If any calm, a calm despair.

In one of the most famous passages in *Maud*, the flowers are shown as experiencing the lover's intense passion and his feeling of pleasurable anticipation.

MORTE D'ARTHUR

I. Introductoin

This poem appeared in the 1842 volume by Tennyson. Subsequently, Tennyson developed and used it as the final poem of *The Idylls of the King.* Here we have the story of the inevitable end. In the last battle King Arthur lies wounded alone, save for Sir Bedivere. He bids Sir Bedivere cast away Excalibur, the mystic symbol of the spiritual power within his soul; and with the ocean of his life behind him he voyages out, on the great water, to another land of hope and renewal. The poem is rich with some of Tennyson's finest imagery and music.

Who was Arthur ? Arthur is a semi-historical and semi-legendary figure. He was probably an English chieftain or general of the 3rd or 6th century. He first takes form as a romantic hero in *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century, and his story was developed by the Norman writer, Wace, who added many details. The "Round Table" is first mentioned by him. The Arthurian story was then developed in French literature and Arthur became the centre of a mass of legends in various tongues.

Sir Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur. Sir Thomas Malory was a 15th century writer. He is famous for having produced in prose a book (translated from French) called *Morte d'Arthur* which narrates the exploits of the knights

of the Round Table, the quest for the Holy Grail[1], the loves of Lancelot[2] and Guinevere and of Tristram[3] and Iseult. Malory's work became the basis of poems by Tennyson, Morris, Swinburne, Arnold, etc.

Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*. Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur* is a part of a bigger work, a poem on an epic scale, called *The Idylls of the King*. The twelve parts which together form the epic are a poetic rendering of the most significant episodes of Sir Thomas Malory's prose work *Morte d'Arthur* (1469). The first of the series, *The Coming of Arthur*, introduces King Arthur, paramount in Britain, married to Guinevere, and surrounded by his Knights of the Round Table, an Order established by the King to right the wrongs of the world. The following ten poems describe the adventures of his chief Knights. The allegory which connects the whole is "the conflict continually maintained between the spirit and the flesh". The mutual love of Lancelot and Guinevere ultimately prevailed over their loyalty to the King; many of the knights proved untrue to their vows and ranged themselves under the standard of Modred, Arthur's treacherous nephew, who tried to usurp the throne. A battle was fought between King Arthur and Sir Modred, as a result of which Modred was killed and Arthur seriously wounded. King Arthur's loyal knights were also killed, the only survivor being Sir Bedivere. Thus came about the dissolution of King Arthur's Round Table :

> But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
> Which was an image of the mighty world.

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1. The Holy Grail was the vessel used by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, in which Joseph of Arimathea received the blood of Christ at the Crucifixion. Sir Galahad and Sir Perceval, two Knights of the Round Table, succeeded in their quest for this holy vessel.

2. Lancelot was one of the Knights of the Round Table. Guinevere was King Arthur's wife. A love-affair developed between these two.

3. Tristram—another Knight.

Tennyson had from an early date shown a strong interest in those Arthurian romances which have so powerfully attracted the imaginative minds of England, France and Germany from the Middle Ages downwards. In England, Spenser had made use of them ; and Milton at one time thought of Arthur as a possible subject for a great poem. But Milton abandoned the design ; and none of those who touched the Arthurian story afterwards had succeeded in making a great poem from it. Tennyson from an early date in his life had contemplated making Arthur the subject of a long work. The result was *The Idylls of the King* consisting of twelve separate poems interlinked by the personality of King Arthur. These twelve poems based upon Sir Thomas Malory's prose narrative are :

1. *The Coming of Arthur.*
2. *Gareth and Lynette.*
3. *The Marriage of Geraint.*
4. *Balin and Balan.*
5. *Merlin and Vivien.*
6. *Geraint and Enid.*
7. *Lancelot and Elaine.*
8. *The Holy Grail.*
9. *Pelleas and Ettarre.*
10. *The Last Tournament.*
11. *Guinevere.*
12. *The Passing of Arthur* (Or, *Morte d'Arthur*).

The Round Table. According to one version, the Round Table was made by Merlin (the Magician). It was given to King Arthur as a wedding gift when he married

Guinevere, daughter of King Leodegrace of Cameliard. It could seat 150 Knights and all places round it were equal.

Excalibur. It was the magic sword given to King Arthur by the lady of the Lake. When Arthur was mortally wounded in the last battle, he ordered Sir Bedivere to throw Excalibur into the lake. A hand arose from the lake, caught the sword and vanished. The word "Excalibur" means "cut steel".

The Lady of the Lake. She is a somewhat indistinct supernatural character in the Arthurian legends. She first appears as giving Arthur the sword Excalibur. She is one of the three queens in the ship in which Arthur is borne away to be healed of his wounds. She also appears as Morgan le Fay, a sister of King Arthur.

Valley of Avilion. A mythical land wither King Arthur is borne to be healed of his wounds. It is a legendary paradise.

Knights of the Round Table. The best known among King Arthur's Knights were Sir Galahad, Sir Lancelot, Sir Perceval and Sir Bedivere.

Symbolic purpose. It is believed that *The Idylls of the King* were intended to convey a symbolic purpose. The whole epic is supposed to represent the continual struggle in man's heart between the Soul and the Flesh—or, between good and evil. Evil may overcome good but this victory cannot last long. King Arthur represents goodness and high ideals. Excalibur is the weapon with which he fought. He was killed and Excalibur was cast away into the water. But that is no cause for pessimism. Arthur, the champion of noble virtues, will come again to rule the world and will be given new weapons wherewith to fight against evil. Such is the ethical purpose of Tennyson's epic.

II. Critical Summary

The poem describes the circumstances of King Arthur's death. In the battle that raged all day at Lyonnesse, King Arthur lost all his Knights of the Round Table with the exception of Sir Bedivere. King Arthur was himself severely wounded. Sir Bedivere lifted the wounded King on his shoulders and carried him to a nearby chapel. Then King Arthur spoke to Sir Bedivere thus : "This day marks the dissolution of the Round Table. The past will not return. I perish by the very people to whom I gave an identity and a life. Merlin, the magician, prophesied that I would be returned to this world to rule once more. Now there is no hope of surviving this deep wound. But I have to entrust you with a task. You know how I got this magic sword (Excalibur). Long ago, one summer noon, a mysterious arm arose from the depths of the lake, holding this sword. I moved towards it and took it from that arm which was clothed in white rich silk and which looked wonderful and mystic. Now I want you to carry this sword, to throw it in the middle of the lake and bring me a report of what you will see".

Sir Bedivere took the sword and set forth towards the lake to carry out the King's command. But when he arrived at the bank of the lake and drew forth the sword, he was dazzled by the beauty and the glitter of the many precious stones, diamonds and topazes, which adorned the hilt. After a brief conflict in his mind, be decided not to throw away the magnificent sword into the lake. He returned to the King and said that he had done what he had been commanded to do. On being asked what he had seen on throwing the sword into the lake, he replied that he had merely heard the sound of the water striking against the rocky shore. King Arthur said that Sir Bedivere had not thrown the sword into the lake and that he had told a lie. It was a shameful thing for a Knight of the Round Table to behave in such a treacherous manner, said King Arthur. He then repeated his previous command.

Sir Bedivere went a second time. But this time also he could not make up his mind to fling such a precious sword into the lake. The sword was a miracle of rare device, and it had been wrought by the Lady of the lake. It would, therefore, be a criminal waste to throw it away. Obedience to the King was not obligatory in cases where the King's command was not just or right. The King wanted the sword to be thrown into the lake. But the King, being sick, did not realise what a loss that would be to the world. This was a sword which deserved to be seen and admired by posterity. If it was lost, posterity would never believe that such a magnificent sword had ever existed. Thus thinking, Sir Bedivere hid the sword a second time, and walked back slowly to the wounded King. But again the King refused to believe that Sir Bedivere had thrown the sword into the lake. He felt enraged and scolded the Knight in strong terms. It was a shame, he said, that Sir Bedivere, who was the last of his Knights of the Round Table and who was expected to show the best qualities of all the Knights, was proving a traitor to him. He then asked him a third time to go and carry out his order.

Sir Bedivere now expelled all hesitation from his mind. He went running to the banks of the lake and, picking up the sword, threw it into lake with all his force. The sword went flashing in the light of the moon and, as it fell downwards, it was caught by a mysterious arm which arose from the surface of the water. This mysterious arm was wrapped in white silk. It held the sword by the hilt, brandished it three times, and drew it under the water. Sir Bedivere returned and narrated the incident to King Arthur. King Arthur felt satisfied to hear the account of the miracle.

King Arthur then called upon Sir Bedivere to carry him to the banks of the lake. He knew that his time to die had come. Speechless with grief and with eyes filled with tears, Sir Bedivere lifted King Arthur and carried him to the bank

of the lake. There they saw a boat, dark like a funeral cloak. On the boat were three Queens wearing crowns of gold. At the sight of the wounded King, the three Queens uttered a cry of agony and lamentation. They received the King in their arms and wept. The tallest of them and the fairest laid the King's head upon her lap, shedding bitter tears. King Arthur's face was white and colourless. His hair was covered with dust. He lay like a shattered column. He no longer looked that Arthur who used to participate in tournaments at Camelot and display his deeds of heroism. Sir Bedivere, in a voice of grief said that he did not know what to do with himself. The good old time were dead, the times of honourable Knights and noble deeds. The whole Round Table, which was an image of the mighty world, had been liquidated. He was the only survivor who would now go forth companionless and spend his remaining years among strange men and strange faces. King Arthur tried to console the Knight. He said that conditions and circumstances always kept changing. Nothing remained the same for any length of time. If the same customs and practices were to be preserved for a long time, they would become stale and useless and would even corrupt the world. King Arthur then asked Sir Bedivere to pray on his behalf when he was gone because "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of". If men do not establish a relationship with God by means of prayer, they would be no better than sheep or goats. King Arthur then bade farewell to Sir Bedivere and told him that he would now sail to the ocean island of Avilion where he would be healed of his wound. The boat then sailed away. Sir Bedivere kept standing on the shore for a long time, recalling past memories, till King Arthur's boat looked a mere dot on the sea.

III. Critical Appreciation

Morte d'Arthur adapts a crucial episode in the Arthurian story to purposes of moral, religious and even political statement :

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Progress, it appears, is God-ordained, beneficial, and necessary. It is true that Arthur has a doubt as to what will happen to him after death, but the tone of Arthur's speech remains assured and serene. The compulsion for the poet to address the world about the world's problems emerges as the voice of the preacher. Yet there are doubts and hesitations dramatised within the poem itself, mainly through the presentation of the puzzled, conscience-tormented, and ultimately lonely figure of Sir Bedivere, and these have much in common with the doubts and hesitations, dramatised explicitly or implicitly, in *The Two Voices*, *Locksley Hall*, and *The Vision of Sin*.

Morte d'Arthur, later to be absorbed with very minor changes into *The Passing of Arthur*, the closing section of *The Idylls of the King*—presents Arthur as being on the verge of death. Like Ulysses, Arthur greets death as a new experience. He commands Bedivere to fling Excalibur into the lake ; but Bedivere rationalises his act in refusing to do so. Bedivere is without faith and denies his vows of obedience to his king, proving unworthy just when he is needed most.

In *Morte d'Arthur*, Tennyson first tried his art upon the legends that are to be gathered upon the shores of old romance, enlarging the picture, and filling up his canvas with a profusion of exquisite detail, the sights and the sounds, the figures of the King and his knights, the ruined shrine, the lake in the full moon, the clanging of Sir

Bedivere's armour, the ripple of the water on the bank. The earliest romances had none of this ornament; they relied on the energetic simplicity with which a bard might relate what was said and done in some tragic emergency; their interest centred in the acts and incidents; they had little care for the descriptive setting of their narratives in landscape or supplementary decoration; their religion was miraculous and almost wholly external. Tennyson retains the dramatic situation, and treats it in a manner that satisfies the modern sensibility to deeper thoughts and suggestions, to the magic of scenery, to that delight in bygone things which is the true romantic feeling in an age when enchanted swords and fairy queens are no longer marvellous realities, and can only be preserved for poetic use as mystic visions. Arthur and his knights have fallen in their last battle; but the Round Table was "an image of the mighty world" in which the old order changes, giving place to new; they have lived their time and done their work; and so the legendary King vanishes, uncertain whether he may be going into some restful Elysium.

Tennyson's narrative quality. This poem gives us a fair idea of Tennyson's gift of story-telling. A feeling of excitement and a sense of mystery are aroused in us by the description of the magic sword. The element of suspense is introduced when Sir Bedivere is faced with a mental conflict as to whether or not he should fling the sword into the lake. There is a dramatic quality in the lines which describe King Arthur's rage on hearing the lie that Sir Bedivere has flung the sword into the lake. The few events in the story move fast. There is no waste of words, and no digression. The King receiving a serious wound, his being carried by Sir Bedivere, his handing over the magic sword to Sir Bedivere and his command to the Knight, the Knight's failing to carry out the command twice, the King's losing his temper, Sir Bedivere's flinging the sword at last into the lake and returning with an account of what he saw, the scene of leave-taking between the King and the Knight, the grief of the three Queens, the King's sailing

away in the boat, the feeling of desolation and forlornness in the heart of Sir Bedivere, these are the fast moving incidents of the story which grips us from first till last.

The supernatural element. There is a strong element of supernaturalism in the poem. We are told of the magic sword which King Arthur received from a mysterious hand that arose from the depths of the lake, clothed in white silk and looking mystic and wonderful. Knowing that his end is near, King Arthur wishes to restore the magic sword to that mysterious hand. When the sword is flung into the lake by Sir Bedivere, the mysterious hand reappears to receive it. We, with our scientific outlook on life, may not believe such miracles ; but we should not forget that this is a story of the middle ages when beliefs in magic and miracles were widespread.

Medievalism. Apart from the medieval belief in magic and miracles, the poem reveals the heroism and chivalry of that period. We are transported to a period of history when heroic deeds were daily performed. Reading through the poem, we breathe the air of medieval chivalry. We are filled with great admiration for King Arthur and his heroic Knights. We are even inclined to forgive Sir Bedivere for his human frailty in not wishing to lose the splendid sword and in twice telling a lie to King Arthur.

Pathos. The prevailing atmosphere of the poem is one of melancholy. Our hearts are touched with sympathy when we read the account of King Arthur's having been wounded and his death being imminent. Sir Bedivere's feeling of desolation at having been left the sole survivor of the Round Table adds to the pathos. The grief of the three Queens on seeing the wounded King is very moving, while the scene of leave taking between the King and his Knight has in it the very essence of tragedy. We are reminded of all the past heroic deeds of King Arthur and his Knights, and we think of their exploits in a mood of wistfulness.

Psychological value. The poem has a psychological quality which adds to its interest. The poem is a remarkable revelation of human nature. Sir Bedivere was a loyal and honourable Knight, and yet even he felt tempted by the splendour and magnificence of the precious stones with which the hilt of the magic sword was studded :

> He gazed so long
> That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
> This way and that dividing the swift mind,
> Inapt to throw ; but at the last it seem'd
> Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
> There in the many-knotted water flags... . ...

Twice did he hide the sword and twice did he tell a lie to King Arthur that he had thrown the sword into the lake. King Arthur's comment on Sir Bedivere's falsehood is perfectly natural and convincing :

> Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
> Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd,
> Thy fealty, nor like a noble Knight :
> For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
> Or voice, or else a motion of the mere,
> This is a shameful thing for men to lie.

And yet Sir Bedivere's hesitation to throw the sword into the lake was also perfectly natural and convincing :

> And if indeed I cast the brand away,
> Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
> Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
> Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
> What good should follow this, if this were done ?

Descriptive quality. An outstanding feature of this poem is the descriptive lines which are vivid in the pictures and images they contain. There are the lines which contain a combined picture of the sky and of the magic sword :

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery.

Here is a beautiful picture of the sword thrown into the lake :

The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon.
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea,

We have a characteristic Nature-picture in the following lines :

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dirt of arm'd hills—
And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Memorable lines. The poem is also remarkable for one passage which contains some very valuable thoughts. Certain lines in that passage have become famous and are often quoted. Those lines are unforgettable because of the essential truth that they embody :

(*i*) The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

(*ii*) More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.

(*iii*) For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends ?

(*iv*) For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

The poem is written in blank verse of which Tennyson shows a great mastery.

Characterisation in *Morte d'Arthur* :

King Arthur. We form a very high and lofty opinion about King Arthur from the poem before us. He has received a grievous wound in the battle. But he has no regrets. He is not afraid of dying although he has a hope that his wound will heal up in the valley of Avilion and that he will return one day to rule the people who have betrayed him and brought about the liquidation of the Round Table. He is sorry that the Round Table has been liquidated, but he does not give way to despair. We are greatly impressed by his wisdom which is expressed in the following famous line where he says :

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world".

King Arthur impresses us also by his religious spirit. He is convinced of the efficacy of prayer. He is a firm believer in God, and must have lived a holy and sinless life. That is why he says :

I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure !.........
.........More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.

He says that, if human being do not believe in God and do not offer prayers to God, they are no better than sheep or goats. Indeed, the religious faith of King Arthur is one of his outstanding qualities.

King Arthur is very particular that his sword, Excalibur, should be thrown back into the lake from where it had been obtained. He is filled with righteous indignation that Sir Bedivere has lied to him twice. He rebukes Sir Bedivere in strong language and warns him that, if he fails to carry out his command for the third time, he would get up and kill him with his own hands. King Arthur is the very flower of chivalry. He is proud of the Order of the Round Table founded by him, although he feels sad to think that the Order has been liquidated by the treachery of his own followers.

We are filled with great admiration for King Arthur's bravery, heroism, gallantry, noble-mindedness, religious faith and high ideals.

Sir Bedivere is one of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table. He is the only one of the knights to survive King Arthur's battle against his enemies. It is he who carries the wounded King Arthur from the field of battle to the chapel nearby in order to tend him. He is greatly devoted to his King and yet he fails twice to carry out the King's order. King Arthur commanded him to go and cast away the magic sword into the lake. Sir Bedivere is so fascinated by the beauty of the hilt of the magic sword that he feels tempted to keep it. The hilt of the sword is studded with numerous diamonds and gems. Twice he hides the sword among the bushes and shrubs and tries to throw dust into the eyes of King Arthur by saying that he has cast the sword into the lake. But King Arthur sees through the trick that Sir Bedivere has played upon him. Sir Bedivere is, therefore, strongly rebuked and reprimanded for his un-knightly conduct. Therefore, when he is bidden for the third time to cast away the sword, he carries out

the order, thus overcoming his greed. Although he is guilty of falsehood and un-knightly conduct, yet we are inclined to forgive him for his human frailty in being tempted to keep the sword for himself. There is much substance in his argument that, if the sword is preserved, it would keep alive the memory of King Arthur and would serve as a concrete evidence of King Arthur's great deeds. We sympathise with Sir Bedivere when he is faced with a conflict whether or not he should cast the sword into the lake.

Sir Bedivere excites our sympathy again when we find him complaining to King Arthur that he will feel miserable and lonely in the years to come. Sir Bedivere is truly distressed at the liquidation of the Round Table, and he wistfully recalls the bygone times "when every morning brought a noble chance, and every chance brought out a noble knight". There is genuine pathos in his lament :

"And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds".

Excalibur was the name of King Arthur's magic sword. It was specially wrought for him by the Lady of the Lake, who took nine years to complete it. The hilt of this sword was studded with numerous precious stones, diamonds, topazes, jacinths. In the light of the moon, the hilt of this sword sparkled with great brilliance. Indeed, the hilt of this sword possessed such exceptional beauty that Sir Bedivere was fascinated by it and was tempted to keep the sword in his possession rather than cast it into the lake. King Arthur had obtained this sword in a strange manner. One day, an arm had arisen from the bosom of the lake, clothed in white rich silk and looking most wonderful and marvellous and holding the magic sword. King Arthur had rowed towards the mysterious arm and taken the sword from it. There were two inscriptions on the magic sword. On one side of it were carved the words "KEEP ME". The other side was carved with the words "CAST ME AWAY". King

Arthur had been puzzled by these mutually contradictory inscriptions. He consulted his court magician, Merlin, who advised him to keep the sword with him during his life-time, and to cast it away into the lake when the hour of his death came. Accordingly, King Arthur had kept this sword with him throughout his life, fighting many battles with it and winning may victories. When his time to die came, he was very particular that the sword be cast into the lake. When the sword was cast into the lake, that mysterious arm arose once again and caught it by the hilt. The Lady of the Lake had offered the sword to King Arthur, and she received it back when it was thrown into the lake.

Excalibur has a symbolic singnificance also. It represents a weapon with which a high-minded man like King Arthur was to fight against the forces of evil in the world. King Arthur had founded the Round Table in order to right the wrongs of the world and in order to establish high ideals among the people. Excalibur was the symbol of righteousness and it enabled King Arthur to win many victories. Excalibur is responsible for the mental conflict of Sir Bedivere, who was so bewitched by the beauty of its hilt that he wanted to keep it in his possession instead of throwing it away into the lake. The circumstances in which the sword was offered to King Arthur and taken back by the Lady of the Lake are among the supernatural elements of the story.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea,
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur; then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more—but let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride; for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known.
But now delay not; take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere;

Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word".

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.
A little thing may harm a wounded man.
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word".
So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mightp bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt;
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw; but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted water-flags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded king.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen, or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag".

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,

Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight ;
For surer sign had followe'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word".

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud :

"And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost forever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done ?
What harm, undone ! deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself ?

The king is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt ? but were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty king,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake :
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills'
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence :
But now much honour and much fame were lost".

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded king.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :
"What is it thou hast seen or what hast heard"?

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
"I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds".

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :
"Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt :
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence ;
But if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands".

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round and whirl'd in an earth,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur ;
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Cloth'd in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him

Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the king.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out; what is it thou hast heard, or seen"?

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere".

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
"My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die".

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words,
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die"
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,

Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funerals are from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and decending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms
Black stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge",
And to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood; for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dias-throne—were parch'd with dust:

Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the king;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole round table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds".

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge;
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way

With these thou seest—if indeed I go—
For all my mind is clouded with a doubt—
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep-meadow'd happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound".

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

Here ended Hall, and our last light, that long
Had wink'd and threaten'd darkness, flared and fell;
At which the parson, sent to sleep with sound,
And waked with silence, grunted "Good" but we
Sat rapt: it was the tone with which he read—
Perhaps some modern touches here and there
Redeem'd it from the charge of nothingness—
Or else we loved the man, and prized his work;
I know not; but we sitting, as I said,
The cock crew loud, as at that time of year
The lusty bird takes every hour for dawn.
Then Francis, muttering, like a man ill-used,
"There now—that's nothing"! drew a little back,
And drove his heel into the smoulder'd log,
That sent a blast of sparkles up the flue.
And so to bed, where yet in sleep I seem'd
To sail with Arthur under looming shores,
Point after point; till on to dawn, when dreams
Begin to feel the truth and stir of day,
To me, methought, who waited with the crowd,
There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore

King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
Of stateliest port ; and all the people cried,
"Arthur is come again : he cannot die".
Then those that stood upon the hills behind
Repeated—"Come again, and thrice as fair ;"
And, further inland, voices echoed—"Come
With all good things, and war shall be no more".
At this a hundred bells began to peal,
That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas morn.

IV. Explanatory Notes

The noise of battle roll'd among the mountains—The sounds of battle echoed and re-echoed among the mountains. This battle was fought between the forces of King Arthur and those of his traitorous nephew, Sir Modred. Modred was killed ; Arthur was mortally wounded through the helmet. *By the winter sea*—near the winter-sea. The season was winter and the fighting took place close to the sea.

King Arthur's table—the Knights of King Arthur's Round Table. Arthur was a legendary or semi-historical English King. Sir Thomas Malory wrote a prose narrative called *Morte D'Arthur* in 1470. In this work King Arthur is depicted as a blameless King, who established the Knights of the Round Table and the Knightly Order of chivalry. It is this romance figure whom Tennyson has celebrated in his *Idylls of the King*. King Arthur lived some time in the Middle Ages, perhaps in the sixth century. The table at which his Knights dined was known as the Round Table. The expression "Round Table" is also used for the Order of Knighthood maintained by King Arthur. The Table was made round so as to avoid rivalry for precedence. The full number of the Knights of the Table was 150. At the table, according to some romances, was one seat known as the Siege Perilous, which was left vacant and reserved for the Knight, who was to achieve the

conquest of the Holy Grail; for any other this seat would prove fatal. (The Holy Grail was the vessel containing the blood of Christ).

Explanation : *Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere... ......the days that were* (Lines 13-21)—The wounded King Arthur then spoke to his sole surviving Knight, Sir Bedivere. King Arthur said that the Order of Knighthood establised by him had that day ceased to exist as a result of the battle. The Order founded by him meant the establishment of the best traditions of chivalry, comradeship and fellowship ever known to the world. The Knights whom he had loved so much were now all dead. Talking in a reminiscent mood, King Arthur lamented the fact that never again would they entertain and regale themselves with talk of chivalrous actions. Never again would they walk about the gardens and the halls of their capital city Camelot, as they used to do in the bygone times. (Notice the touch of pathos in these lines).

Note. The mysterious arm that arose from the Lake symbolises religion. The sword given to King Arthur represents the sword of the spirit meant to be used against the forces of evil and wickedness. On one side of this sword were engraved the words : "Take me" and on the other side were the words "Cast me away". The magician Merlin advised King Arthur to keep the sword and to cast it away when the time came.

Mere—lake. *Fling him far into the middle mere*—throw the magic sword far into the middle of the lake. Tennyson treats the magic sword as something living ; therefore, the use of "him" for the sword.

Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word—King Arthur asks Sir Bedivere to go, to throw the sword into the lake, to see what happens as a result thereof, then to come back quickly and tell him what he has seen."

Explanation : *Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur .....and lightly bring me word.* (Lines 27-38)—King Arthur had received a grievous wound. He said that most probably he would not survive beyond the morning. He handed his magic sword to Sir Bedivere and recalled the circumstances under which this sword had come into his possession. One summer noon, a long time ago, an arm had mysteriously risen above the surface of the lake. This mysterious arm was clothed in rich white silk. It was something strange, wonderful and marvellous. The hand held a sword. On seeing this hand with the sword, King Arthur had got into a boat and rowed towards it. He had taken the sword from the hand and had worn it ever since. He had always used it in right causes, as a King should. He had always felt proud of this sword. After his death, chroniclers, poets and historians would write stories about him, and would describe this incident of the sword also. King Arthur then directed Sir Bedivere to go immediately and to cast the magic sword far into the middle of the lake. He further directed Sir Bedivere to come back and tell him if he saw anything strange after he had thrown the sword into the lake.

Important Note. As has been pointed out already, this magic sword was a gift from the Lady of the Lake to King Arthur. The Lady of the Lake had spent nine years, making this sword. The supernatural element in the story of King Arthur is to be noted. There is an allegorical significance in all this. King Arthur represents the ideals of truth, goodness, righteousness, etc. The magic sword offered to him symbolises the weapon of righteousness with which the forces of evil were to be conquered. When on the verge of death, King Arthur wanted the sword to be restored to the Lady of the Lake because the sword had done its work. Sir Bedivere, however, did not realize the significance of throwing away the sword into the lake. Being swayed by worldly considerations, he wanted to keep the sword the hilt of which was studded with dazzling gems and diamonds.

Explanation : *Then there drew he forth the brand Excalibure ...subtlest jewellery* (Lines 52-58)—Sir Bedivere now stood on the bank of the lake. He had arrived there in order to carry out the King's order. He drew forth the magic sword from the sheath (or scabbard). It was a cold frostly evening. The moon was behind a cloud, the edges of which were brightened by moonbeams. In a moment, the moon emerged from behind the cloud, and its beams illumined the hilt of the magic sword. The hilt was studded with numerous precious stones of different colours—diamonds, topazes and jacinths. The precious stones glittered in the moon with a dazzling light. The workmanship of the hilt was most excellent and most skilful. In other words, the hilt had been most artistically and exquisitely studded with precious stones of different colours, and they produced a most brilliant effect in the light of the moon.

Explanation : *But at the last it seem'd ..about the marge*—After wavering for some time, Sir Bedivere decided not to cast away such a beautiful and precious sword. On the bank of the lake there grew a large number of iris flowers. As the wind blew over the stiff and dry flowers, a whistling sound was heard. Sir Bedivere thought that the best course would be to hide the magic sword among the flowers which grew there in many bunches.

Explanation . *To whom replied, King Arthur .....and lightly bring me word* (Lines 72-81)—When Sir Bedivere said that he had seen nothing unusual after throwing the magic sword into the lake, King Arthur did not believe him. The wounded King now looked pale, and felt very weak. He scolded Sir Bedivere for telling a lie. The conduct of Sir Bedivere, he said, was not worthy of a true and loyal knight. A noble and loyal knight was not expected to disobey the King and then tell lies. If the sword had been thrown into the lake, some definite reaction would have been visible. A mysterious hand might have emerged from the lake, or a mysterious voice would have been heard ; or, at

least, the water of the lake would have been agitated. It was evident that the sword had not been thrown into the lake. King Arthur said that he had a great affection for Sir Bedivere. He repeated his order to Sir Bedivere and urged him not to disobey the order this time. He directed him to go, to throw the sword into the lake, to come back quickly and to report to him what he had seen.

Explanation ; *What good should follow this .....against himself*? (Lines 92-96)—Sir Bedivere argues that no good will come of throwing away the sword into the lake. It is true that the King's order should be honoured But if the King gives a wrong order, obedience to that order is not desirable. The King has expressed his desire for the sword to be thrown away into the lake but Sir Bedivere thinks that the King is not in his proper senses and that he does not realise the folly of his wish. The King certainly deserves to be obeyed, but if obedience to the King does some harm to the King himself and brings about no good results, then the King's order may be ignored.

Explanation ; *The King is sick and knows not what he does......and much fame were lost* (Lines 97-100)—Sir Bedivere argues against throwing the sword into the lake. Being wounded, the King seems to him to be out of his mind. The King's order, therefore, need not be taken seriously. If the sword were thrown into the lake, no evidence of its existence would remain in this world. If the sword is preserved, it would serve as a remembrance of King Arthur for the coming generations. If the sword were now lost, the coming generations would never be certain that King Arthur once existed. In the absence of the testimony of the sword, there would be only fake rumours and empty gossip about King Arthur and his deeds. If the sword were to be preserved in the treasure-house of great kings to follow, it would then become an object of curiosity, and would be exhibited on the occasions of contests of arms or tournaments. The sword would be shown to the people as the magic weapon of King Arthur given to

him by the lonely Lady of the Lake. Some old man would narrate the history of the magic sword to the people. He would tell them that the Lady of the Lake spent nine years, sitting at the bottom of the Lake, beside the submerged base of the hills, working upon the sword, which she gave to King Arthur as a gift. The old man narrating the history of the magic sword would excite the wonder of the people and would win their respect. If, however, the sword were thrown into the lake, much glory would be lost.

Explanation : *To whom replied King Arthur......Woe is me* ! (Lines 118-120)—King Arthur at once understood that Sir Bedivere was again telling a lie. He felt furious. He rebuked Sir Bedivere in very strong language. He said that Sir Bedivere was false, disloyal, callous, treacherous and not worthy of being called a knight. King Arthur, indeed, felt sorrowful to find that Sir Bedivere had deceived him a second time.

Explanation : *Authority forgets a dying king .....giddy pleasure of the eyes* (Lines 121-128)—King Arthur deplores the fact that his order is being disobeyed because he is about to die. When he was hale and hearty, there was such power in his eyes that he could subdue his Knights and others by a mere look. But now that he is on the verge of death, Sir Bedivere has ventured to disobey him. Sir Bedivere is the last surviving Knight of King Arthur's Round Table. As such, he should combine in himself all the best qualities and virtues of all those Knights who had died. But instead of continuing the traditional virtues and qualities of those Knights, Sir Bedivere is proving treacherous to the King by telling him lies about the sword. Sir Bedivere's unwillingness to fling away the sword into the lake is due to one of the following reasons: Either Sir Bedivere has developed a sudden greed and wants to keep the sword for himself because it is so precious. Or, Sir Bedivere wishes to gloat over the beauty and brilliance of the diamond-studded hilt of the sword and is,

therefore, like a girl who wants to feast her eyes upon a beautiful sight. In either case, says King Arthur, it is an unworthy thing on the part of Sir Bedivere not to fling away the sword into the lake as desired by the King.

Explanation : *Then quickly rose...and threw it* (Lines 133-136)—This time Sir Bedivere did not disobey the King's command. Rising quickly he rushed down the rocks and picked up the sword from where he had concealed it among the plants. Holding the sword firmly in his hand, he swung it in circles with great force so as to lend it momentum and he then cast it into the waters of the lake. He did the whole thing with the greatest possible speed so as not to give himself time to waver in his purpose. If he had started looking at the hilt, he might once again have been tempted to keep the sword instead of throwing it.

Explanation : *The great brand made lightnings........... the brand Excalibur* (Lines 136-147)—Sir Bedivere had cast the sword after wheeling it strongly. The magic sword, the hilt of which was studded with numerous precious stones, produced a series of flashes in the bright light of the full moon. The magic sword seemed to be travelling like the bright light known as Aurora Borealis, which is seen in the northern latitudes in the Arctic sky, while the floating icebergs there produce loud nioses in the northern sea.

Explanation : *So saying, from the pavement......the place of tombs* (Lines 168-176)—King Arthur, after seeing that his end was near, raised himself slowly and painfully, supporting himself on his arm. The expression in his blue eyes showed that he was thinking longingly of the days gone by. He had half raised himself from the pavement where he lay. The expression in his eyes had the fixity of a picture. Sir Bedivere was moved almost to tears to see the critical condition of King Arthur. He looked at the King with deep sorrow. He wanted to say something but did not have the words to express himself. Then very carefully he knelt on one knee and, holding the limp and powerless hands of King

Arthur, drew him on his shoulders. Carrying the King in this manner he walked through the graveyard towards the lake.

Explanation : *But, as he walk'd King Arthur panted hard......and the long glories of the winter moon* (Lines 177-192)—This passage describes the anxiety of King Arthur to reach the bank of the lake and the anxiety of Sir Bedivere to carry his burden to the destination before King Arthur died. King Arthur breathed heavily and quickly, like a man who has seen a horrible dream in his sleep at night when the whole house is silent and still. The King whispered into the ears of Sir Bedivere, urging him to walk fast lest he should die before arriving at his destination. Sir Bedivere walked quickly from rock to rock. As he walked, his breath froze into a mist. The mist seemed to envelop him and to enlarge his figure as he crossed the rocks. As he went onwards, he heard the sound of the ocean waves from behind, and the mournful sound of the waves of the lake coming from before him. (The ocean lay behind and the lake lay before him. The rocks over which he was walking were situated between the lake and the ocean). His own thoughts, in addition to the King's repeated appeals, prompted him to walk fast. He too wanted that he should carry the King to the bank of the lake while the King was still alive. As he walked on, his armour produced a dry, metallic sound among the icy caves and the barren hollows around him. The barren and black hills rising on his left and right seemed to echo the ringing sound of his armour. A ringing sound was also produced by the tread of his ironshod heels, which struck with great force against the rocks over which he walked. Every time he took a step forward, he had to put his foot firmly on the projecting and slippery edge of the rock. Suddenly, he saw the smooth waters of the lake stretching before him. The waters of the lake looked beautiful with the white light of the winter moon falling upon them.

Explanation : *Then saw they how there hove...the making of the world* (Lines 193-203)—Sir Bedivere and King Arthur

then saw a dark boat sailing towards the bank of the lake. The boat was black from the front portion to the rear. It was black all over. Its blackness was symbolic of a funeral. As Sir Bedivere descended the rocks with King Arthur on his shoulders, they both became aware of the fact that the boat was crowded with a large number of majestic figures. All these figures were shrouded in long, loose robes of a black colour. They all wore black hoods. They looked unearthly beings. Their figures were indistinct and shadowy. By the side of this crowd of figures were three queens wearing crowns of gold. When Sir Bedivere approached the bank of the lake, the three queens uttered a cry of pain. It was a cry of such pain that, in the wintry night, it travelled up to the sky and sent a sharp piercing sensation even through the stars. The groans of the three queens seemed to mingle together into one single voice. It was a cry of immeasurable grief and misery. This cry was like a wind that blows with great force over a wilderness throughout the night,—a wilderness which has never been visited by anyone in the past ever since the creation of the world and which is not likely to be visited by anyone in the future. This cry, if heard over such a wilderness, would seem to echo and re-echo there throughout the night. (The three Queens were Morgan Le Fay (the fairy Queen), the Queen of Northlands, and the Queen of Wastelands, smybolising the Christian virtues of the Faith, Hope and Charity).

Explanation : *And like the wither'd moon smote by the fresh beam of the springing east*—Early in the morning, when the sun rises, the moon fades away. It seems as if the rising sun has struck a blow at the brightness of the moon and robbed it of its light. In the same way King Arthur seemed to have been robbed of his colour.

Explanation : *Then murmur'd Arthur......before the eyes of ladies and kings* (Lines 204-225)—This passage contains a pathetic description of the wounded King Arthur. Seeing the boat on which stood the three queens, King Arthur asked Sir Bedivere to put him on that boat. Sir Bedivere

did as he was bidden. The three queens on the boat were symbolic of Hope, Faith and Charity. The three queens stretched their hands to receive the body of the King and wept. The tallest and fairest of the three, namely, the fairy queen, Morgan le Fay, laid King Arthur's head upon her lap. She loosened the broken helmet of King Arthur. She rubbed his hands for warmth. She called him affectionately by his name and uttered loud cries of pain and grief. She shed bitter tears of grief against King Arthur's forehead which was stained with the blood that had flowed from the wound. He looked white and bloodless. He could be compared to the moon whose light fades in the morning when the bright sun rises in the east. The armour which he wore on his shins and thighs was all covered with blood. His bright and shining hair, which used to lend to his face the glory of sunrise, was now dry and dusty. The curls of his hair were clotted together on account of frozen blood and hung loose upon his moustaches. As he lays helpless, he could appropriately be compared to a broken column. He did not look the King Arthur who used to be the flower of chivalry and gallantry and who, armed fully from head to foot, used to distinguish himself by his brave deeds in contests of arms at Camelot in the presence of ladies and kings.

Explanatoin : *Such times have been not since the light that led the holy Elders with the gift of myrrh* (Lines 232-33)— The reference here is to the birth of Lord Jesus Christ. A bright star appeared in the sky when Jesus was born. On seeing this light, the Holy Elders or the Magi (the wise men of the East) travelled with presents and gifts to the place where Christ lay in the cradle. Sir Bedivere says that, since the birth of Lord Jesus Christ, there never have been such times as those during which King Arthur founded his Order of the Round Table. Sir Bedivere means that never before had there been a time of such heroic deeds and such chivalry (According to the Biblical story, the wise men of the East carried gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Tennyson mentions only myrrh here).

Explanation : *The old order......corrupt the world* (Lines 240-2)—King Arthur says that the conditions and circumstances of human life keep always changing. The world in which we live is not static or stagnant. The old pattern of living cannot continue for ever, no matter how good or valuable that pattern might be. Even a valuable institution will lose its value if it is allowed to continue too long. There is a point beyond where even a useful custom becomes harmful. Change in the political, social, economic and religious life of man is, therefore, healthy and wholesome and should be welcomed. God does not reveal his purpose through fixed condition of life. God reveals himself in many ways. Every change that we witness around us is a manifestation of God's will.

Explanation : *More things... friend.* (Lines 247-53)—King Arthur asks Sir Bedivere to pray to God on behalf when he is gone. Prayer, he says, is a very effective and fruitful means of achieving one's desires. Prayer can work wonders. Human beings who do not pray to God are no better than sheep or goats. Human beings ought to establish a direct relationship with God through prayer. Those who do not offer prayers to God on their own behalf and on behalf of their friends are little better than beasts. Such persons lead an animal life of spiritual ignorance.

Explanation : *I am going a long way of my grievous wound* (Lines 256-264)—King Arthur says that he is now going to make a long journey. He is not quite sure whether he will be able to make this journey, because his mind is confused. He has a feeling that he is going to make this journey to the valley of Avilion. In the valley of Avilion, there is no rain, no snow, no hailstones. Nor does any stormy winds blow there. It is a beautiful and happy valley with rich pasture-lands and beautiful grassy areas overgrown with fruit trees. There are many hollows which would serve as shady resting-places. It is a place where there is perpetual summer and where his wounds would heal up. (The valley of Avilion was a kind of paradise where King Arthur was supposed to go, and where he was to be healed of his wounds).

2. THE TWO VOICES

I. Introduction

This poem was begun in 1833 and it appeared in *Poems* (1842). It was originally entitled *Thoughts of a Suicide* and was written in the crisis after Hallam's death. It "was begun under the cloud of this overwhelming sorrow (Hallam's death) which .. ..for a while blotted out all joy from his life, and made him long for death". It continues in a deeper philosophic key the melancholy musing of *Locksley Hall*. There is a similar disconsolate protest against the vanity and emptiness of life ; there is the feeling of doubt and disillusion, the sombre self-examination, and that same vague longing for the battlefield as a remedy for the morbid sensibility which reappears later in *Maud*. And the poem ends like *In Memoriam* with a revival of faith and hope under the influences of calm natural beauty, household affections, and the placid ways of ordinary humanity.

The Two Voices may be regarded as Tennyson's "To be or not to be", a fight between self and soul, and between the "Everlasting No"[1] and the Everlasting Yea".

II. Critical Summary

A Voice (which may be called the Voice of negation) speaks to the poet and says that it would be better not to live than to live a life of misery. The poet replies that he would not like to put an end to his body which is so wonderfully made. The Voice does not consider this to be a valid reason for not committing suicide, and says that even a dragon-fly has a wonderful and radiant shape. The poet's answer to this is that man is the finest product of Nature, that he possesses the lordliest proportions, and that he holds dominion over all other creatures. The Voice attributes this feeling of the poet to sheer pride and says that even if

1. "Everlasting No." and "Everlasting Yea" are phrases used by Carlyle to express a denial of God and immortality and a faith in them respectively.

he were to put an end to his life ("this mould of hopes and fears"), there would yet be plenty of his kind left in the world. The poet replies that no individual life is like another and that, therefore, every human being is unique in himself. The Voice scoffingly says that, if the poet puts an end to his life, it would not make the least difference to the world and that not one beam will become less bright. The poet, feeling overwhelmed by his sorrow, begins to shed tears and the Voice insists that, if he is so steeped in misery, it would surely be better to put an end to his life. His anguish, says the Voice, will not let him sleep and will not let him think.

To the suggestion of suicide repeated by the Voice, the poet now replies that if he kills himself he will be denying to himself the happier developments that are likely to occur in the world. His morbidity, says the poet, might yet take a turn. But the Voice points out that no drug can cure palsy and that similarly no development in the world can diminish the poet's grief. The poet feels that by killing himself he would render himself incapable of learning the new truths which mankind is likely to discover. There will be advances in the march of mankind, even though he may watch them from "a ruin'd tower". But the Voice replies that, no matter how much knowledge he is able to acquire, there will yet be unlimited masses of knowledge still left "because the scale is infinite". It is better not to breathe or speak than to cry for strength and remain weak. The poet asks if, by committing suicide, he will not provoke the censure of people and if people will not accuse him of dishonouring his clay. The Voice points out that he is a coward if he is afraid of what people will say, that he is mistaken in thinking that people care for him, and that when he is dead he will not be able to hear either praise or blame.

The poet recalls the days when he was full of hope and when he used to yearn for human praise. Those were the days when he sang joyful songs, when he waited to fight

against falsehood, when he used to seek, through all he felt or saw, the springs of life, when he wanted to promote some good cause, and when he felt like a warrior doing battle for his country. (It is not clear what Tennyson alludes to here, because neither his life nor his poetry had been dedicated to such experiences as are described in these lines: 122-156. Perhaps he is referring to his abortive expedition to the Pyrenees in 1830 and to the chimerical ideal expressed in the sonnet "*Mine be the strength of spirit, full and free*".)

The Voice of negation points out that, as a dream, his desire to promote some good cause is good but that it nevertheless is a dream. To follow knowledge, the Voice insists, is to chase shadows; and if one goes on the quest, one cannot be sure of what one finds. Death is the only goal worthy of attainment ("There is one remedy for all".)

The poet replies that the Voice is taking a one-sided view. He refers to persons who, striving hard against the confusion of systems and creeds, have seen the distant glory of heaven and who, like Stephen, have enjoyed certain secret heavenly transports. The poet, by committing suicide, would only be moving from a bad into a worse position and may, in trying to undo one riddle, find himself faced with a hundred other riddles. Death may release him from the pain of this life only to imprison him in some unknown condition of permanent agony. The Voice thereupon depicts the picture of a dead man. In the dead man there is neither passion, pain nor pride: he cannot obey commands nor even understand them; he has lost the power to speak. His daughter may bring dishonour to the family but he will not know it. He is unaware of the raving winds and winter rains. But the poet replies that these may only be the outward signs of death. Man has in him an inner capacity to sense a mystery to which he gives the name of Eternity. A Heavenly Friend (the dead Arthur Henry Hallam, perhaps) may speak to a living being (that is, the poet himself) from behind the veil and tell him that there is an

ultimate goal to life. Surely, inside man and outside him, there must be an answer to man's doubts if only man's wisdom could find out that answer.

The Voice with which the poet has been contending pauses a little, but it is only a momentary defeat. The Voice speaks again. The Voice reminds the poet of the life of the poet's father who grew up to manhood, took a wife, reared his children and who ultimately died, having lived "a life of nothing worth". This argument does not seem to have much weight, says the poet. He agrees that "to begin" implies "to end" but it is possible that the end of a life is not final and that, having ended, life begins again. Just as a man gets into a trance, awakens from it, gets into another trance, awakens again, and so on, in same way we perhaps pass from one life to another and then to another. The fact that we forget our previous life does not mean that we had no previous life. Our forgetfulness of our previous life is only a lapse of memory because memory deals only with time while the soul is infinite. The poet feels that there is something that touches him with mystic gleams, "like glimpses of forgotten dreams", something which no language can express. The Voice laughs and says that the poet's dreams are not worth talking about. The Voice points out that the poet's misery in this world is a reality, not a dream.

The poet has by this time acquired a lot of self-confidence. He, therefore, resists the discouraging and demoralising suggestion of the Voice and accuses the Voice of having tried to wreck the poet's life by making all the horizon look dark. Despite all the sorrow in the world, no human being has ever truly longed for death, says the poet. It is for life, and not for death, that we crave. What the poet wants is not death, but more life, a fuller life.

The poet ceases speaking and sits as one forlorn. The Voice points out, in quiet scorn, that it is a Sunday morning. The poet gets up and opens the window which lets in the fresh light of the dawn. He hears the

sweet church bells beginning to ring. He sees people going to church. He especially notices a man, his wife, and his daughter walking to church and presenting such a touching sight that the poet's frozen heart begins to beat. The poet blesses this church-going family which looks so sweetly united. The poet tries to speak to the Voice but there is no reply. "The dull and bitter voice" was gone and its place had been taken by a second voice which whispered words of encouragement to the poet : "Be of better cheer". This second voice assures the poet that life has a positive side and that good will ultimately triumph. This voice speaks to the poet of a "hidden hope". These assurances of the voice bring a great comfort to the poet who now begins to feel that "every cloud, thet spreads above and veileth love, itself is love". Although the poet cannot prove it, yet he comes to the firm conclusion that the universe is governed by the principle of love and that there is no basis for despair.

The poet then goes forth into the fields and finds that the stirring life of Nature is a source of hope to the discontented mind. The sight of flowers and the sound of birds' song make him feel that there is no justification for him to entertain any sense of wrong. He wonders how his mind had been overcome by gloom and why he had been holding a dialogue with the Voice of negation when there was another voice that has proved to be a source of comfort and joy.

III. Critical Appreciation

The Two Voices, like several other poems of Tennyson, expresses a conflict. Here the poet argues within himself whether or not life is worth living. In a mood of intense depression, the poet hears a voice which says in effect that, as he is unhappy and as there is no particular purpose or good working itself out through all the suffering in the universe, he should put an end to life. The other voice finds answers. At first the negative voice seems stronger,

but eventually it is defeated. *The Two Voices* is one of Tennyson's most impressive poems. The arguments are vigorously and memorably expressed on both sides. The last section has often been criticised and ridiculed, but is not as inadequate or sentimental as is generally suggested. There is certainly something comical about the Victorian family going to church. The churchgoers (most of them hypocritical) are a common enough sight, but the poet sees them under the emotional stress of a night that had brought him to the verge of suicide; he looks at them afresh, is moved even to bless them and a new hope takes charge of his heart. The three members of the family stand in his mind for goodness in mankind, and more specifically for the goodness which is promoted in society by a well-ordered family life. In the emotional condition which the poem records, the knowledge of such goodness is sufficient to confirm a new hope that has come in the place of despair.

An American writter (J. S. Buckley) says of the argument of this poem that it "moves by delays towards its preconceived solution". He means that Tennyson really knew from the start that he was going to make the good voice triumph and that we can see him "manipulating the arguments to that end". Thus seen, the poem is a consciously thought-out piece of dialectic. One does not feel that the material took charge of the imagination; one feels that the determination to come to an optimistic conclusion took charge of the writer. Indeed, it is a fact that in both *The Two Voices* and *The Palace of Art* the poet argues a case using imaginative poetic means to do it. But *The Lotos-Eaters* and *The Lady of Shalott* are poems of a different kind. In these, the purpose of the writer is not consciously or deliberately projected. The inner meaning of these two poems is suggestively conveyed; and these are more truly poems. In these two poems, Tennyson wears a mask; but in *The Palace of Art* and *The Two Voices* he is Alfred Tennyson standing naked before the nineteenth-century public.

The poet's experience leaves him, like Coleridge's Wedding-guest, "like one that hath been stunned,/And is of

sense forlorn ; and, as in the *Ode to a Nightingale*, the very word "forlorn" is like a bell tolling him back form a world of phantasms in which the "still small voice" takes place, and he is now able to turn his thoughts outward. He knows, like the Wedding-guest, that he is a wiser man as a result of the experience, but for the moment he is not able to formulate the meaning of the encounter. Only when he sees a mother and a father walking to church with their daughter does he fully accept the value of his declaration to the voice of despair. His feeling of sympathy with the happy family causes the frozen heart to beat, and where previously he had been unable to feel, he now blesses them. The blessing of the family results from a forgetfulness of self in recognising the beauty of something quite independent. The speaker is now conscious of something other than self and he now realises that he is part of the universe and he shares a bond in common with other men. And when he blesses them, the voice of despair disappears, just as the albatross falls from the neck of the Ancient Mariner when he blesses the water snakes. Like the Ancient Mariner, the poet once again senses himself in harmony with the universe ; to him now "Nature's living motion lent/The pulse of hope to discontent".

The picture of domesticity at the close of the poem also follows the pattern of Tennyson's development. He had moved tentatively from poems of doubt, despair, and profound melancholy to verses such as *The Miller's Daughter* which exalted family happiness and tended to glorify domestic love. The ending of *The Two Voices*, therefore, with the speaker's feeling "that every cloud that spreads above/And veileth love, itself is love", carries a step further the idea of love as the transcending and affirming power which was expressed in the three sonnets of 1830 entitled *Love*. Here Tennyson relied on Pascal's maxim that the heart has its reasons which reason cannot know, or as he was to say in *In Memoriam*, he accepted believing where he could not prove.

The Two Voices is a comedy in the sense in which Dante's poem is a comedy; it marks a progression from despair to bliss; and as such it is an excellent document for the study of Tennyson's development. From the same feeling that he shared with Carlyle's Teufelsdroeckh—that the world is ruled only by matter and is devoid of spirit—he passed through the period of a denial of life to the period of the Centre of Indifference, in which he refused to accept the voice of negation. He begins to perceive the Everlasting Yea: apprehends not only that the world is alive but also that the pervading spirit of the universe, love, is good.

The closing stanzas throw some light upon Tennyson's attitude to Nature. The poet looks upon Nature as a consoling and healing influence. Here he completely forgets the cruelty and waste in Nature and dwells only upon her benign influence. The following lines have an almost Wordsworthian quality:

> And forth into the fields I went,
> And Nature's living motion lent
> The pulse of hope to discontent
>
> ... ...
>
> The woods were fill'd so with song,
> There seem'd no room for sense of wrong.

The description of the glitter and brightness of the dragon-fly in the opening stanzas is also noteworthy: "A living flash of light he flew".

A still small voice spake unto me,
"Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be"?

Then to the still small voice I said:
"Let me not cast in endless shade
What is so wonderfully made".

To which the voice did urge reply:
"To day I saw the dragon-fly
Come from the wells where he did lie.

"An inner impulse rent the veil
Of his old husk; from head to tail
Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.

"He dried his wings; like gauze they grew;
Thro' crofts and pastures wet with dew
A living flash of light he flew".

I said: "When first the world began,
Young Nature thro' five cycles ran,
And in the sixth she moulded man.

"She gave him mind, the lordliest
Proportion, and, above the rest,
Dominion in the head and breast".

Thereto the silent voice replied:
"Self-blinded are you by your pride;
Look up thro' night; the world is wide.

"This truth within thy mind rehearse,
That in a boundless universe
Is boundless better, boundless worse.

"Think you this mould of hopes and fears
Could find no statelier than his peers
In yonder hundred million spheres"?

It spake, moreover, in my mind :
"Tho' thou wert scatter'd to the wind,
Yet is there plenty of the kind".

Then did my response clearer fall :
"No compound of this earthly ball
Is like another, all in all".

To which he answer'd scoffingly :
"Good soul ! suppose I grant it thee,
Who'll weep for thy deficiency ?

"Or will one beam be less intense,
When thy peculiar difference
Is cancell'd in the world of sense" ?

I would have said, "Thou canst not know",
But my full heart, that work'd below,
Rain'd thro' my sight its overflow.

Again the voice spake unto me :
"Thou art so steep'd in misery,
Surely 't were better not to be.

"Thine anguish will not let thee sleep,
Nor any train of reason keep ;
Thou canst not think, but thou wilt weep".

I said : "The years with change advance ;
If I make dark my countenance,
I shut my life from happier chance.

"Some turn this sickness yet might take,
Even yet". But he : "What drug can make
A wither'd palsy cease to shake" ?

I wept : "Tho' I should die, I know
That all about the thorn will blow
In tufts of rosy-tinted snow ;

"And men, thro' novel spheres of thought
Still moving after truth long sought,
Will learn new things when I am not".

"Yet", said the secret voice, "some time,
Sooner or later, will gray prime
Make thy grass hoar with early rime.

"Not less swift souls that yearn for light,
Rapt after heaven's starry flight,
Would sweep the tracts of day and night.

"Not less the bee would range her cells,
The furzy prickle fire the dells,
The foxglove cluster dappled bells".

I said that "all the years invent;
Each month is various to present
The world with some development.

"Were this not well, to bide mine hour,
Tho' watching from a ruin'd tower
How grows the day of human power"?

"The highest-mounted mind", he said,
"Still sees the sacred morning spread
The silent summit overhead.

"Will thirty seasons render plain
Those lonely lights that still remain,
Just breaking over land and main?

"Or make that morn, from his cold crown
And crystal silence creeping down,
Flood with full daylight glebe and town?

"Forerun thy peers, thy time, and let
Thy feet, millenniums hence, be set
In midst of knowledge, dream'd not yet.

"Thou hast not gain'd a real height,
Nor art thou nearer to the light,
Because the scale is infinite.

" 'T were better not to breathe or speak,
Than cry for strength, remaining weak,
And seem to find, but still to seek.

"Moreover, but to seem to find
Asks what thou lackest, thought resign'd,
A healthy frame, a quiet mind''.

I said : "When I am gone away,
'He dared not tarry,' men will say,
Doing dishonour to my clay.''

"This is more vile,'' he made reply,
"To breathe and loathe, to live and sigh,
Than once from dread of pain to die.

"Sick art thou—a divided will
Still heaping on the fear of ill
The fear of men, a coward still.

"Do men love thee ? Art thou so bound
To men that how thy name may sound
Will vex thee lying underground ?

"The memory of the wither'd leaf
In endless time is scarce more brief
Than of the garner'd autumn-sheaf.

"Go, vexed spirit, sleep in trust ;
The right ear that is fill'd with dust
Hears little of the false or just''.

"Hard task, to pluck resolve,'' I cried,
"From emptiness and the waste wide
Of that abyss, or scornful pride !

"Nay—rather yet that I could raise
One hope that warm'd me in the days
While still I yearn'd for human praise,

"When, wide in soul and bold of tongue,
Among the tents I paused and sung,
The distant battle flash'd and rung.

"I sung the joyful Paean clear,
And, sitting, burnish'd with fear
The brand, the buckler, and the spear—

"Waiting to strive a happy strife,
To war with falsehood to the knife,
And not to lose the good of life—

"Some hidden principle to move,
To put together, part and prove.
And mete the bounds of hate and love—

"As far as might be, to crave out
Free space for every human doubt,
That the whole mind might orb about—

"To rearch thro' all I felt or saw,
The springs of life, the depths of awe,
And reach the law within the law ;

"At least, not rotting like a weed,
But, having sown some generous seed,
Fruitful of further thought and deed,

"To pass, when Life her light withdraws,
Not void of righteous self-applause,
Nor in a merely selfish cause—

"In some good cause, not in mine own,
To perish, wept for, honour'd, known,
And like a warrior overthrown ;

"Whose eyes are dim with glorious tears,
When, soil'd with noble dust, he hears
His country's war-song thrill his ears :

"Then dying of a mortal stroke,
What time the foeman's line is broke,
And all the war is roll'd in smoke".

"Yea !' said the voice, "thy dream was good,
"While thou abodest in the bud.
It was the stirring of the blood.

"If Nature put not forth her power
About the opening of the flower,
Who is it that could live an hour ?

"Then comes the check, the change, the fall,
Pain rises up, old pleasures pall.
There is one remedy for all.

"Yet hadst thou, thro' enduring pain,
Link'd month to month with such a chain
Of knitted purport, all were vain.

"Thou hadst not between death and birth
Dissolved the riddle of the earth.
So were thy labour little worth.

"That men with knowledge merely play'd,
I told thee—hardly nigher made,
Tho' scaling slow from grade to grade;

"Much less this dreamer, deaf and blind,
Named man, may hope some truth to find,
That bears relation to the mind.

"For every worm beneath the moon
Draws different threads, and late and soon
Spins, toiling out his own cocoon.

"Cry, faint not: either Truth is born
Beyond the polar gleam forlorn,
Or in the gateways of the morn.

"Cry, faint not, climb . the summits slope
Beyond the furthest flights of hope,
Wrapt in dense cloud from base to cope.

"Sometimes a little corner shines,
As over rainy mist inclines
A gleaming crag with belts of pines.

"I will go forward, sayest thou,
I shall not fail to find her now.
Look up, the fold is on her brow.

"If straight thy track, if oblique,
Thou know'st not. Shadows thou dost strike,
Embracing cloud, Ixion-like;

"And owning but a little more
Than beasts, abidest lame and poor,
Calling thyself a little lower

"Than angels. Cease to wail and brawl !
Why inch to by inch to darkness crawl ?
There is one remedy for all".

"O dull, one-sided voice", said I,
"Wilt thou make everything a lie,
To flatter me that I may die ?

"I know that age to age succeeds,
Blowing a noise of tongues and deeds,
A dust of systems and of creeds.

"I cannot hide that some have striven,
Achieving calm, to whom was given
The joy that mixes man with Heaven ;

"Who, rowing hard against the stream,
Saw distant gates of Eden gleam,
And did not dream it was a dream ;

"But heard, by secret transport led,
Even in the charnels of the dead,
The murmur of the fountain-head—

"Which did accomplish their desire,
Bore and forebore, and did not tire,
Like Stephen, an unquenched fire.

"He heeded not reviling tones,
Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
Tho' cursed and scorn'd, and bruised with stones ;

"But looking upward, full of grace,
He pray'd, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face.''

The sullen answer slid betwixt :
"Not that the grounds of hope were fix'd,
The elements were kindlier mix'd''.

I said : "I toil beneath the curse,
But, knowing not the universe,
I fear to slide from bad to worse ;"

"And that, in seeking to undo
One riddle, and to find the true,
I knit hundred others new ;

"Or that this anguish fleeting hence,
Unmanacled from bonds of sense,
Be fix'd and frozen to permanence :

"For I go, weak from suffering here ;
Neked I go, and void of cheer :
What is it that I may not fear ?"

"Consider well," the voice replied,
"His face, that two hours since hath died ;
Wilt thou find passion, pain or pride ?"

"Will he obey when one commands ?
Or answer should one press his hands ?
He answers not, nor understands.

"His palms are folded on his breast ;
There is no other thing express'd
But long disquiet merged in rest.

"His lips are very mild and meek ;
Tho' one should smite him on the cheek,
And on the mouth, he will not speak.

"His little daughter, whose sweet face
He kiss'd, taking his last embrace,
Becomes dishonour to her race—

"His sons grow up that bear his name,
Some grow to honour, some to shame,—
But he is chill to praise or blame.

"He will not hear the north-wind rave.
Nor, moaning, household shelter crave
From winter rains that beat his grave.

"High up the vapours fold and swim ;
About him broods the twilight dim ;
The place he knew forgetteth him".

"If all be dark, vague voice", I said,
"These things are wrapt in doubt and dread,
Nor canst thou show the dead are dead.

"The sap dries up : the plant declines.
A deeper tale my heart divines.
Know I not death ? the outward signs ?

"I found him when my years were few ;
A shadow on the graves I knew,
And darkness in the village yew.

"From grave to grave the shadow crept ;
In her still place the morning wept ;
Touch'd by his feet the daisy slept.

"The simple senses crown'd his head :
'Omega ! thou art Lord', they said,
'We find no motion in the dead' !

"Why, if man rot in dreamless ease,
Should that plain fact, as taught by these,
Not make him sure that he shall cease ?

"Who forged that other influence,
That heat of inward evidence,
By which he doubts against the sense ?

"He owns the fatal gift of eyes,
That read his spirit blindly wise,
Not simple as a thing that dies.

"Here sits he shaping wings to fly ;
His heart forebodes a mystery ;
He names the name Eternity.

"That type of Perfect in his mind
In Nature can he nowhere find.
He sows himself on every wind.

"He seems to hear a Heavenly Friend,
And thro' thick veils to apprehend
A labour working to an end.

"The end and the beginning vex
His reason ; many things perplex,
With motions, checks, and counterchecks.

"He knows a baseness in his blood
At such strange war with something good,
He may not do the thing he would.

"Heaven opens inward, chasms yawn,
Vast images in glimmering dawn,
Half shown, are broken and withdrawn.

"Ah ! sure within him and without,
Could his dark wisdom find it out.
There must be answer to his doubt,

"But thou canst answer not again.
With thine own weapon art thou slain,
Or thou wilt answer but in vain.

"The doubt would rest, I dare not solve,
In the same circle we revolve.
Assurance only breeds resolve".

As when a billow, blown against,
Falls back, the voice with which I fenced
A little ceased, but recommenced :

"Where wert thou when thy father play'd
In his free field, and pastime made,
A merry boy in sun and shade ?

"A merry boy they call'd him then,
He sat upon the knees of men
In days that never come again ;

"Before the little ducts began
To feed thy bones with lime, and ran
Their course, till thou wert also man :

"Who took a wife, who rear'd his race,
Whose wrinkles gather'd on his face,
Whose troubles number with his days ;

"A life of nothings, nothing worth,
From that first nothing ere his birth
To that last nothing under earth" !

"These words", I said, "are like the rest :
No certain clearness, but at best
A vague suspicion of the breast :

"But if I grant, thou mightst defend
The thesis which thy words intend—
That to begin implies to end ;

"Yet how should I for certain hold,
Because my memory is so cold,
That I first was in human mould ?

"I cannot make this matter plain,
But I would shoot, howe'er in vain,
A random arrow from the brain

"It may be that no life is found,
Which only to one engine bound
Falls off, but cycles always round.

"As old mythologies relate,
Some draught of Lethe might await
The slipping thro' from state to state.

"As here we find in trances, men
Forget the dream that happens then,
Until they fall in trance again.

"So might we, if our state were such
As one before, remember much,
For those two likes might meet and touch.

"But, if I lapsed from nobler place,
Some legend of a fallen race
Alone might hint of my disgrace ;

"Some vague emotion of delight
In gazing up an Alpine height,
Some yearning toward the lamps of night ;

"Or if thro' lower lives I came—
Tho' all experience past became
Consolidate in mind and frame—

"I might forget my weaker lot :
For is not our first year forgot ?
The haunts of memory echo not.

"And men, whose reason long was blind,
From cells of madness unconfined,
Oft lose whole years of darker mind.

"Much more, if first I floated free,
As naked essence, must I be
Incompetent of memory ;

"For memory dealing but with time,
And he with matter, could she climb
Beyond her own material prime ?

"Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—

"Of something felt, like something here ;
Of something done, I know not where :
Such as no language may declare".

The still voice laugh'd. "I talk", said he,
"Not with thy dreams. Suffice it thee
Thy pain is a reality".

"But thou", said I, "hast missed thy mark,
Who sought'st to wreck my mortal ark,
By making all the horizon dark.

"Why not set forth, if I should do
This rashness, that which might ensue
With this old soul in organs new ?

"Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly long'd for death.

"This life, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh, life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want".

I ceased, and sat as one forlorn.
Then said the voice, in quiet scorn,
"Behold, it is the Sabbath morn".

And I arose, and I released
The casement, and the light increased
With freshness in the dawning east.

Like soften'd airs that blowing steal,
When meres begin to uncongeal,
The sweet church bells began to peal.

On to God's house the people prest;
Passing the place where each must rest,
Each enter'd like a welcome guest.

One walk'd between his wife and child,
With measured footfal firm and mild,
And now and then he gravely smiled.

The prudent partner of his blood
Lean'd on him, faithful, gentle, good,
Wearing the rose of womanhood.

And in their double love secure,
The little maiden walk'd demure,
Pacing with downward eyelids pure.

These three made unity so sweet,
My frozen heart began to beat,
Remembering its ancient heat.

I blest them, and they wander'd on;
I spoke, but answer came there none,
The dull and bitter voice was gone.

A second voice was at mine ear,
A little whisper sliver-clear,
A murmur, "Be of better cheer".

As from some blissful neighbourhood,
A notice faintly understood,
"I see the end, and know the good".

A little hint to solace woe,
A hint, a whisper breathing low,
"I may not speak of what I know".

Like an Aeolian harp that wakes
No certain air, but overtakes
Far thought with music that it makes;

Such seem'd the whisper at my side;
"What is it thou knowest, sweet voice?" I cried.
"A hidden hope," the voice replied;

So heavenly-toned, that in that hour
From out my sullen heart a power
Broke, like the rainbow from the shower,

To feel, altho' no tongue can prove,
That every cloud, that spreads above
And veileth love, itself is love.

And forth into the fields I went,
And Nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.

I wonder'd at the bounteous hours,
The slow result of winter showers;
You scarce could see the grass for flowers.

I wonder'd, while I paced along;
The woods were fill'd so full with song
There seem'd no room for sense of wrong:

And all so variously wrought,
I marvell'd how the mind was brought
To anchor by one gloomy thought;

And wherefore rather I made choice
To commune with that barren voice,
Than him that said, "Rejoice! Rejoice!"

IV. Explanatory Notes

Note. The poem is written in the form of a dialogue which takes place between the poet himself and a voice within him. In other words, the poem describes a conflict between the poet and his other self. The voice which speaks to the poet is the voice of negation and utters thoughts which normally tend to demoralise almost every thinking man. To put it differently, the poet is assailed by spiritual doubts, uncertainty, fear etc., but is able to hold out against these destructive forces.

Explanation *To which the voice did urge a reply . A living flash of light he flew* (lines 7-15)—The voice of negation does not attach much importance to the wonderful body which a human being has got. Even a tiny creature like a dragon-fly, says the voice, has a glittering and fascinating body.

Explanation : *It spake, moreover, in my mind... ..Is cancell'd in the world of sense* ? (lines 31-43)—The voice of negation says that, if the poet commits suicide, there would still be plenty of human beings left in the world. But the poet points out that every human being is unique in himself and that, therefore, the death of any one human being would be an irreparable loss. The voice of negation, however, scornfully says that if the poet commits suicide the world will in no way be poorer and that nobody will weep over the negligible gap created by his death.

But my full heart .. ..its overflow (lines 44-45)—But the poet's heart was so overwhelmed by grief that tears began to flow from his eyes.

Thou canst not think, but thou wilt weep (line 57)—The voice of negation says that the poet's grief will not allow

the poet even to think and that his misery will always make him shed tears.

But he : "What drug can make/A wither'd palsy cease to shake ? (lines 56-57)—But the voice of negation reminded the poet that no drug could cure palsy and that, in the same way, no matter what the happy developments in the life of mankind, nothing would cure the poet's grief. (*Palsy*—a disease which generally afflicts people in extreme old age and makes their limbs shake or tremble all the time.)

Yet, said the secret voice, some time......dappled bells (lines 64-72)—The secret voice, or the voice of negation, points out that sooner or later the poet will die. After the poet's death, the normal activities of mankind would continue unchanged. People who seek the truths of heaven will continue their quest and researches. The bees would continue building their cells, and the valleys would continue to be filled with blossoms and flowers of all kinds.

To bide mine hour (line 76)—to wait for the right time. *Tho' watching from a ruin'd tower*—although looking at the spectacle in a mood of desolation. The poet asks if it will not be better for him to continue living and to watch the growth of human power and achievement even though his own mood will be one of desolation.

The highest mounted mind, he said .. ..Because the scale is infinite (lines 79-93). The voice of negation points out that even the most highly equipped mind cannot acquire all the knowledge. Thirty years may pass, but the mysteries of Nature will remain mysteries. Even if the poet were now to acquire the knowledge that would be available a thousand years hence, it would be no real achievement because there is no end to knowledge in the universe. Even if the poet is able to acquire at this very stage the knowledge that would become available to the rest of mankind a thousand years later, it would be no occasion for jubilation because that knowledge would be only a small fraction

of the totality of knowledge in the universe. (*Millennium*—a thousand years).

He dared not tarry (line 101)—he dared not continue living ; he was afraid to stay on in the world.

The memory of the wither'd leaf . ...Autumn-sheaf (lines 112-114)—Nobody remembers a withered leaf beyond a moment. Equally brief is the memory of the autumn harvest of corn. A human being who is dead is remembered no longer than a withered leaf or an autumn harvest.

Paean (line 127)—song.

Note. In lines 151-156, the poet recalls the days when he was inspired by noble principles and when he used to strive in good causes even if he could not achieve them. It is not clear what exactly Tennyson refers to in these lines, because neither his life nor his poetry gives any clue to the ideas he expresses here. It may be that he merely imagines what a young man is likely to be thrilled and inspired by. In any case, he argues that life is worth while if a human being can thrill to some noble cause and if he strives for the achievement of that cause even though he may ultimately fail.

In lines 157-200, the voice of negation gives a reply to the poet's argument. The voice says that the poet's dream was excellent but that it was merely a dream. A man who has such dreams soon discovers the obstacles and obstructions in his way and finds that his labours in the pursuit of such dreams ultimately prove futile even if he seems to be progressing from stage to stage. Every human being, toiling for truth, reaches his own conclusions even as a worm draws differents threads, spinning its own cocoon, (*cocoon*—wrapping in which a silk-worm lives securely).

Cry, faint not, climb the summit's slope......There is one remedy for all (lines 184-200)—The voice of negation in these lines describes human failure in metaphorical language.

A human being striving to find the essential truths of life is compared to a mountain climber. A mountain climber sees distant summits which are wrapped up in thick clouds. The clouds may clear a little over a certain edge of a summit and the climber may begin to feel hopeful but the very next moment the cloud gathers again and the summit is rendered invisible. The mountain climber does not, therefore, know whether his path is straight or tortuous. A human being knows just a little more than beasts and considers himself just a little inferior to angels ; but he feels helpless and wretched. It is no use grumbling and struggling. It is better to die at one stroke than to move towards the darkness of death inch by inch.

He heeded not reviling tones ..God's glory smote him on the face (lines 221-225)—This is a description of the dauntless spirit of Stephen who was scorned and cursed, and rebuked and hit with stones, but who did not give up courage. Eventually Stephen was rewarded with the grace of God. (The poet cites the case of Stephen as an argument in favour of a ceaseless effort and endeavour. Stephen was the first Christian martyr. He was stoned to death by his enemies. He came to be known as Saint Stephen).

The sullen answer—the grumbling reply of the voice of negation.

Or that this anguish fleeting henee ..to permanence (lines 235-237)—The poet says that if he kills himself he will no doubt put an end to the earthly pain which he is undergoing. But there is also the possibility that once he is released from the bonds of the body, he may become subject to a fixed and permanent kind of grief. In other words, death may only lead him to a ceaseless kind of anguish or misery. (*Anguish*—distress ; pain. *Unmanacled*—released. *Bonds of sense*—the prison of the body).

Consider well, the voice replied The place he knew forgeteth him (lines 241-264)—The voice of negation describes the utter and complete insensibility of a dead man. A dead

man feels neither passion, nor pain, nor pride. He does not obey when given a command. There is no feeling visible on his face. He will not speak even if he is slapped on the cheek or on the mouth. It does not matter to him in the least if his daughter brings disgrace to the family. His sons may bring a good name to the family or a bad name; he can neither hear praise nor blame. He does not hear the shrieking of the loud winds and is indifferent to the winter rains that hit his grave. He is not aware of the clouds above or the twilight around him.

Sap—the essential life-fluid inside a plant.

Divines—imagines.

Know I not death ?—I am well aware of death.

Village yew—the yew tree growing in the village church yard. The yew tree is a symbol of grief and mourning.

Touch'd by his feet the daisy slept—the daisy faded away at the touch of death.

The simple senses crown'd his head (line 277)—Judged by the evidence of the senses, death appeared to be supreme.

Omega—the last letter in the Greek alphabet.

Forged—manufactured ; prepared ; gave rise to.

Forebodes—anticipates.

Eternity—everlastingness ; immortality.

A *Heavenly Friend*—a friendly voice from beyond the grave. (The reference is perhaps to Arthur Henry Hallam).

To apprehend—to become aware of.

If all be dark, vague voice, I said .....He may not do the thing he would (lines 265-303)—The poet replies to the voice

of negation with strong arguments. Death does not seem to be the final end, he says. The sap in a plant dries up and the plant withers away. Likewise the organs and senses of a man lose their animation, and the man dies. But these are only the outward sings of death. Judged by the evidence of the senses, death is the supreme lord. The graves in a graveyard bear testimony to this supremacy of death. But it is difficult to believe that, after death, man simply rots in the grave. There is some divine spark within us which urges us not to believe the evidence of the senses merely. There is something in man that refuses to accept death as the final end. The heart of man is aware of some kind of mystery beyond the grave. Man has a dim awareness of immortality. We seem to hear a voice from beyond the grave telling us that there is a definite goal for the human soul. We are no doubt troubled and overwhelmed by perplexities and riddles. There is something low and base in us which seems to be at war with the good in us. Yet the feeling of immortality is very strong in us.

Chasms—gulfs.

Yawn—open.

Glimmering dawn—dawn with its half light and half darkness.

Billow (line 316)—wave.

Fenced—contended ; argued.

As when a billow ..but recommenced (lines 316-818)—Just as a wave is pushed back by a strong wind, so the voice of negation was repulsed by the poet's affirmations. But the voice of negation was not yet completely subdued. It had something more to say.

Where wert thou when thy father play'd ....To that last nothing under earth (lines 319-333)—In these lines the voice

of negation briefly traces the life history of the poet's father. There was a time when the poet's father was himself a little child and the poet did not exist at all. The poet's father grew up from childhood to manhood, got married, begot children, advanced in years with wrinkles appearing on his face, faced more and more troubles in life, till he died. It was a worthless life from the very beginning to the very end. The voice of negation here emphasises the idea of the utter futility of human life.

A random arrow from the brain (line 346)— a random guess ; an idea which the brain hits upon just at random.

Lethe (line 350)—the river of forgetfulness ; the mythological river the water of which has the power to make a man forget everything.

Trance—a spiritual state in which a man becomes absolutely unconscious of his surroundings and is lost in profound meditation.

As old mythologies relate ..Until they fall in trance again (lines 349-354)—According to a myth, a man becomes forgetful of the past by drinking the water of the river Lethe. It is quite possible that man passes from one life to another and, in doing so, he forgets the previous life completely. This idea is made more clear by a reference to a man falling into a trance, waking from it, falling into another trance, and so on. Thus a man may also go through a series of lives one after the other, forgetting each previous life.

And men, whose reason long was blind ..Beyond her own material prime ? (lines 370-378)—A man who has lost his reason does not, on regaining it, remember what happened during the period of insanity. The period of insanity may last for years but, at the end of it, a man will have entirely forgotten what happened during those years. In

the same way, a man completely forgets his previous existence. After all, human memory is limited in its scope. If, before coming into this world, the human soul was free, the memory which man possesses on this earth is not expected to be able to recall the soul's experiences before it comes into this world. Human memory cannot transcend the barriers of time and space.

Moreover, something is or seems Such as no language may declare (lines 379-384)—In addition to that, the poet says that there is something which makes him aware of some kind of spiritual light. Just as a man has the feeling that he has seen certain dreams though he cannot recall them, so the poet has a feeling of a life before birth though he cannot even vaguely recall it. He has a feeling of a previous existence though it is not possible for him exactly to define or describe this feeling.

Whatever crazy sorrow saith...More life, and fuller, that I want (lines 394-399)—The poet now offers another argument. Whatever a man may feel under the stress of his grief, he never experiences a genuine desire to die. Human beings long and pine not for death, but for life. We deplore not life, but the want of life. The poet would like to have more of life and he would like to have a fuller life. (This may be regarded as the climax of the poem because thoughts of suicide here have given way to a strong desire not only for life but for a fuller life).

Sabbath morning—Sunday morning.

Casement—window.

Meres—lakes ; ponds.

Uncongeal—melt.

To peal—to ring aloud.

The prudent partner of his blood—the thrifty wife.

Demure—modest.

On to God's house the people prest...Remembering its ancient heat (lines 409-423)—This picture of domesticity has been regarded by some critics as a flaw in the poem, but has been defended by others. The sight of a church going family produces a wholesome effect upon the poet whose heart, frozen before, now melts and who is moved to bless them. As he blesses this family, the voice of negation is finally silenced: "The dull and bitter voice was gone" (line 426). Thus the poem ends with a moral very much like *The Ancient Mariner.* Now a different voice speaks to the poet and speaks words of encouragement: "Be of better cheer" (line 429) and "I see the end, and know the good" (line 432).

To solace—to comfort; to offer relief.

Aeolian harp—a musical instrument which produces sweet sounds when a wind blows on its strings. (*Aeolian*—pertaining to Aeolus, the god of the wind).

In lines 445-447, the final conclusion of the poem occurs. The universe is governed by the principle of Love, and Love is all pervading. Under the benign influence of Love, we human beings have no reason to feel grief-stricken.

In lines 448-456, Tennyson gives expression to the view that Nature has a consoling and soothing effect upon the human mind. Nature's living motion lends the pulse of hope to discontent, (lines 449-450). In the woods there seemed no room for a sense of wrong (line 455).

The poem which begins with a feeling of deep distress, profound grief, and complete despair, ends with a feeling not only of comfort and consolation but jubilation; "Rejoice! Rejoice!"

Introduction

Tennyson in a note states that 'this poem saw the light along with the dawn in a Lincolnshire lane at 5 o'clock in the morning, but the scene imagined is Clevedon on the Bristol channel. The sea washes the cliff churchyard where Hallam lies buried. Hallam, however, had suddenly died in Austria.

Arthur Henry Hallam (1811-1833) was Tennyson's greatest friend at Cambridge and betrothed to his sister Emily. Though he was younger by two years, his was the leading mind in the friendship. He opened up to Tennyson new fields of study and of thought and exercised a great over Tennyson by his life and still more by his death. After his death, Tennyson develops into an artist with a serious purpose. *In Memoriam* (1850) commemorates the death of Hallam, but it is not a poem of lament or a funeral dirge. It is a poem rather on life, on human hopes and fears roused by death, whereas, *Break, Break, Break* is a mournful wail. The intensity of feeling and of personal loss is nowhere so poignantly expressed as in this perfect lyric. In the 1842, volume, it is the most thoughtful and perfect of his songs.

'It is a piece of perfect work, fully felt, and fully finished, simple and profound—and with what fine art Nature is inwoven with its passion.'—(Brooke). The nearness of personal feeling and deep sorrow is no where better expressed. It should be also noted as an illustration of 'the dominance of the man' in Tennyson that the poem of the deepest regret for love lost in death is written in memory of a man.

The perfection of the song is also due to his masterful handling of the metre. There are three accents in each line, except in the 11th and 15th. The first line consists of three monosyllables and *each* one of them bears an accent

and takes as much time in reading as the succeeding lines, which are longer.

Break, break, break
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

The stresses on the 11th and 15th lines are shown below.

But O' for the touch of a vanish'd hand,

and,

But the tender grace of a day that is dead.

These two lines with the unexpected fourth accent create an effect of lingering sadness'.

Summary

The poet notices the sea breaking upon the cliff church-yard where his friend Hallam lies buried and would fain express the sorrow that fills his heart. He sees the fisher-man's boy playing merrily with his sister, and hears the sailor lad singing in his boat. He observes stately vessels sailing majestically to their heaven. These activities serve to awaken in his heart a keen sense of the loss which he has sustained by the death of his friend who is gone for ever and whose voice has been silenced for all time. He is filled with sadness at the thought that the happy days he spent with his friend can never return.

BREAK, BREAK, BREAK

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea;
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

Stanza I

Break, Break, Break.—The repetition expresses the monotony of the process and serves to indicate the apathy of nature to human feelings. *Cold grey stones*—The cliff churchyard where Hallam lies buried at Clevedon. *I would*—I wish I could express my poignant feeling, but wores are inadequate. *Utter*—express. *Thoughts*—of sorrow at the recollection of his friend's death.

Stanza II

O well—it is well for etc. The fisherman's boy or the sailor lad has no grief, no sorrow to weigh him down. Not only nature but human life also seem apathetic.

Stanza III

Stately ships—ships sailing majestically. *Heaven*—port. *O for the touch etc.*—similarly Wordsworth cries out -

"But O! the difference to me"

O for—how I long for. *Vanish'd hand*—the hand of his friend Hallam snatched away by death. *Still*—silenced by death.

Stanza IV

a day that is dead.—a time which is now departed and when his dear friend was living.

tender grace.—the loveliness and the affectionate feelings which absorbed him completely while Hallam was alive Cf.

> 'Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
> .. ..
> And thinking of the days that are no more.'

TEARS, IDLE TEARS

Introduction

This enquisite lyric was added in 1850 to *The Princess* which, inspired by the woman question, had appeared in 1847. Even though in Tennyson's time, his recognition of the woman's sphere was unusually liberal, the problem no longer rouses our passion or interest. The long poem will not have many readers now, but the songs which were added in 1850 are 'worthy to rank among the best even Tennyson, always a master of the lyric, ever wrote'.

A word about its metre. There are no rhymes in this lyric, but it is surprising that no one misses them and Tennyson himself liked to think how few readers noticed the absence of rhymes. That is indeed a remarkable achievement. A passage of ordinary blank verse has no obvious parts and looks like a fragment. To short poems, therefore, which require a visible unity, rhyme is almost indispensable. But Tennyson has shown in this and a few other poems that rhyme is not essential. In this particular poem, he forms a stanza by the device of a refrain, 'the days that are no more', repented in every fifth line. The orderly arrangement is further emphasised by the introduction of a new image in every stanza.

The song, *'Tears, idle tears'* is sung by a girl. 'She sings it in her own person. The lines :

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweets as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others :

are intimate with a passion, elsewhere almost unknown in Tennyson'.—(S.A. Brooke) the song is primarily one of the sorrow of love past by for ever, of the days that are no more. It does not represent love or the raptures of love in fulfilment but 'the wild regret of its continued existence in unfulfilment'. The whole song is drenched in the 'heavy dew of long and living sorrow for love just touched but unattained'.

The song is also valuable in as much as it incidentally reveals Tennyson's attitude towards Death. Shelley could yearn for the Infinite.

'The One remains, the many change and pass' and he would merge in the One. Browning would Challenge Death to a single combat, which would be his last and greatest adventure. To Wordsworth, it would be the return of the *transient* to 'Nature the Eternal' and Arnold met it clear-eyed and resigned. Tennyson's attitude is the most human. Death brings the fundamental homesickness for old familiar faces, familiar things, like the broken table, the old armchair, the songs of the birds with which we have been familiar from our childhood.

TEARS, IDLE TEARS

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair.
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge,
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square,
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others ; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret ;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

NOTES

Stanza I

Idle-ineffectual tears, because no tears will bring back the past that is inexorable and irrevocable.

Note how Tennyson employs the vowel sounds—'ea' is replated thrice, twice in 'tears' and once in 'mean' with a varying sound ; 'i' is repeated twice, once in 'idle', again in 'I' ; 'O' is repeated twice, once long as in 'know', again short as in 'not'. It is this skilful variation of vowel sounds which creates the musical effect.

Divine despair-'despair' proves that man is linked with 'divine'. The brutes never experience 'despair'. It is man who owing to his infinite hopes and aspirations is ever unhappy. In the infinite there is no happiness. And he thus yearns for the infinite which is unattainable to him and is filled with despair.

Happy-the autumnal fields look happy owing to the golden crops and they naturally revive in us memories or remembrances of the happy days that are no more.

Stanza II

a sail,-a ship, the figure is synecdoche, part for the whole. You are to imagine yourself waiting on the seashore and expecting the arrival of some dear friends and straining your eyes to the remotest lines of the horizon, till at last the ship becomes visible when the rays of the early sun strike against the ship.

from the underworld-antipodes or that part of the ocean's surface which lies below the horizon, from which the ship seems to ascent into the range of one vision.

verge-the extremest limit of the horizon.

so sad-the days are not sad, the remembrance or the memory of the happier days is sad. 'Sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering happier things'.

Stanza III

Dark summer dawns-the early morning twilight in summer.

Half-awaken'd-the birds begin to chirp even when half-awake at the approach of dawn.

The casement......spuare-the casement is the frame-work of a window. At early dawn, when the sun is still sunk below the horizon but is beginning to rise, on the upper portion of the casement will be lighted. As the sun rises higher and higher, the whole casement is gradually lighted. Is the dying eyes, this gradual process, through a familiar sight, is sad and strange. Even so is the memory of the days that are no more.

glimmering-faintly shining.

after death-memory of love lost in death. The object of love is dead. The memory alone remains.

lips for others-sweet as the kisses imprinted in imagination only on lips, to which one has no claim. As the kisses

were never actually enjoyed, they were never dulled by usage or custom and their sweetness ever remains unsullied.

First love-has an unusual, intensity or impetuosity.

regret-regret of hopeless love lost in death or love which has been just imagined, never fulfilled, and regret of the intense passion of love unrealised and never to be experienced in future.

Death in Life-the phrase is from Coleridge's.

Ancient Mariner-but Tennyson has used it in a different context. The days that are no more have passed away, but this sad memory, will with all regretfulness and profoundly sorrowful, lingers, tenaciously and refuses to be obliterated though the past is irrevocable and lost in Death or lost for ever never to be brought back.

CROSSING THE BAR

Introductino

This was composed in 1889. Tennyson's son writes—Crossing the Bar was written in my father's eighty-first year on a day in October when we came from Aldworth to Farringford. Before reaching Farringford he had the moaning of the Bar in his mind, and after dinner he showed me this poem written out.

I said, 'That is the crown of your life's work'. He answered, 'It came in a moment'. He explained the 'Pilot' as 'That Divine and unseen who is always guiding us'. A few days before my father's death he said to me, 'Mind you put *Crossing the Bar* at the end of all editions of my poems.

The poem is a fitting conclusion to a long life of fears and doubts with its ultimate triumph in the peace and tranquillity of an immortal life. It is 'the clear cry of happy faith all doubt and trouble past'. Death will fling

open the gates of all that we desire in our heart. The poet so long tossed by doubts and conflicting hopes and fears is at long last conscious of victory. There is no more speculation and 'certainty is hard at hand'. The soul comes out of the Deep and returns to it again and there should be no mourning or 'Sadness of farewell'.

The versification is as smooth as in the best of songs of his earlier days. Tennyson knew how to adapt the metre to the end in view and he had not declined in his skill as a versifier even in advanced.

CROSSING THE BAR

Sunset and evening star.
    And one clear call for me !
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
    When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
    Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
    Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
    And after that the dark !
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
    When I embark ;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
    The flood may bear far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
    When I have crost the bar.

Notes

1 Tennyson adopts the metaphor of a lip which had come from the deep sea to harbour for a short while and is sailing out again to the deep sea at sunset with the evening star shining clearly in the twilight sky.

2 **Clear call**-the call of the Deep Sea of Eternity.

3 **Moaning of the bar**-the bar is a barrier of sand or sandy ridge across the mouth of a river. With ebb tide,

the waters flowing over the bar lose their depth and the shallow sea makes a low 'moaning' sound as it flows over the ridge.

4 **Put out to sea** when I sail from the harbour of life to the great sea of eternity.

5—6 The poet wants to leave when the tide is full, i.e. he will die in full faith that there is nothing but peace and glory bond death. There will be no 'sound and form', no conflicting fears and doubts, no agitation of the mind. Perfect peace and tranquillity will prevail. When the tide is full, the waters are deep, and the waters move noiselessly, without froth and foam, and the sandy ridge causes no obstruction and the voyage across the ridge from life to eternity is calm and smooth.

7—8 Human life is no better than a short term borrowing from eternity. From eternity we come and to eternity we go.

boundless deep-the deep sea of eternity, cf. Wordsworth.

> 'Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither'.

9—10 These two lines indicate the time when the vessel will put out to sea. Tennyson, however, died three years latter in 1892, in the early morning of October 6th, when the moonlight was flooding into his room.

11—12 **Embark**-on the voyage to the Eternal. There should be no 'sadness of farewell', because he is, afterall, returning home.

15 **Pilot**-the divine and unseen Power who always guides us. He has guided me here and He will guide me there too.

Introduction

This poem was first published in the winter of 1832. It has undergone very considerable alterations : of the eighty-three stanzas of which it originally consisted, some thirty-one have been omitted, and in those that remain much has been changed, while twenty-two entirely new stanzas have been added.

The poet has prefixed to the poem the following explanation of its purpose :—

"I send you here a sort of allegory,
(For you will understand it) of a soul,
A sinful soul possess'd of many gifts,
A spacious garden full of flowering weeds,
A glorious Devil, large in heart and brain,
That did love Beauty only (Beauty seen
In all varieties of mould and mind)
And Knowledge for its beauty ; or if Good,
Good only for its beauty, seeing not
That Beauty, Good, and Knowledge are three sisters
That doat upon each other, friends to man,
Living together under the same roof,
And never can be sundered without tears.
And he that shuts Love out, in turn shall be
Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie
Howling in outer darkness. Not for this
Was common clay ta'en from the common earth
Moulded by God, and temper'd with the tears
Of angels to the perfect shape of man".

We have here, then, an allegorical picture of a being possessed of the highest mental powers and of every means to gratify intellectual craving, who deliberately resolves to spend life in the contemplation of objects of beauty and in the cultivation of aesthetic refinement. For this purpose he deems it necessary to build for his Soul an isolated abode

where it may dwell apart from mankind in unapproachable seclusion; to surround it with artificial reproductions of whatever beauty Nature presents in flowing stream, or branching wood, in rainbow colours, or sweet odours; and rigorously to exclude from view every unpleasing sight and sound. The dwelling is adorned with representations of ideal landscapes, with pictured legends, and with the portraits of bards and philosophers. The struggles of the human race in its endeavour to assert the rights of manhood are recognised only so far as they serve to supply graceful pictorial devices, which are made to ornament the pavement under the feet as though unworthy of serious attention.

While the aesthetic and intellectual faculties are thus cultivated to perfect development, the other side of a man's nature, the emotions and affections of the heart, is neglected and starved. Absorbed in the triumphant consciousness of her own supremacy and the enjoyment of her own power, the Soul ignores her relation to God and her duties to the human race. The natural sympathies which bind man to man are allowed to rust with disuse, until they give place to a scornful disdain of ordinary human life, which is pictured as wallowing in gross animal enjoyments: these have no charm for the cultured Soul, and she prides herself on an isolation as complete as that of those gods who dwelt "careless of mankind" in the unapproachable heaven of heathen mythology.

But such immunity from the common yoke of mortality is not given to mortal: for man is "then most Godlike, being most a man". He who "shuts Love out" shall sooner or later awake to the consciousness that he has cut himself off from human sympathy, and, like Richard III, in Shakspeare, who "had neither pity, love, nor fear", shall cry in despair,

> "There is no creature loves me,
> And if I die, no soul shall pity me".

Loathing and disgust shall take the place of selfish delight, and that isolation which seemed "godlike", graced with all

signs of beauty and power, shall change into a stagnant solitude, peopled only with ghastly spectres and images of corruption.

But though awakened to scorn of herself and horror of her slothful pride, the mind cannot easily renounce its belief in refinement as the highest virtue, and the natural emotions, so long disused, will not readily spring into active life. By slow degrees, however, the conscience is fully aroused, and the feeling that, while the whole universe around her is advancing from lower to higher conditions, she alone remains stationary, possesses the Soul; she sees that it is only by descending from her "intellectual throne", by abandoning the sole worship of beauty for its own sake, that she can hope to share in the life of mankind and in the high hopes that humanity is heir to. She leaves her proud palace, and steps in humility down to join the common life of her fellows.

It was not, however, in culture and the love of beauty that the evil lay; they were not low and despicable faculties and tastes that the Soul had cultivated: there was nothing sensual or degrading in the joys of the palace. When the neglected side of her nature has been duly encouraged to grow, when the claims of duty to one's neighbour are recognised and the voices of the conscience and the heart are listened to, then the palace may be again inhabited by the Soul; she may return there not to shut herself up in proud isolation, but bringing others, her fellow-men, with her. If the fruits of intellectual culture are shared "with others" and loving service is thus rendered to her fellow-creatures—if, in Bacon's words, knowledge be no longer regarded as "a tower for a proud mind to raise itself upon", but as "a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate", then the Soul will no longer look on the Palace of Art as a loathsome prison-house but as a happy home.

The lesson of this poem has been taught by many teachers before Tennyson. St. Paul taught it when he

wrote, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity (*i.e.* love) buildeth up", and again, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge...and have not charity, I am nothing". Bacon recognised the truth of this teaching when he thus explained St. Paul's words :—"Not but that it is an excellent thing to speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but because, if it be severed from charity, and not referred to the good of men and mankind, it hath rather a sounding and unworthy glory than a meriting and substantial virtue".

In Mrs. E. B. Browning's *The Poet's Vow*, a poet "forswears man's sympathies" to live in solitary communion with Nature :—

"God's five-day work he would accept,
But let the rest go by".

But he breaks his vow at sight of the corpse of his deserted bride, and dies upon her bier.

Critical Appreciation

1. **The allegorical meaning of "The Palace of Art".**
2. **Comparison with Browning's "Easter-Day".**
3. **The poetry of common human life in the conclusion.**
4. **The relevance of the poem to the nineteenth century aesthetic thought.**
5. **The poem illustrates a struggle in Tennyson's mind.**
6. **The alleged failure of the poem as a moral allegory.**

The Palace of Art, as Tennyson explains in the preface, is a sort of allegory. It is an expression of the view that "we cannot live in art", and of the belief that "the God-like life is with man and for man" In writing this poem Tennyson was trying to act upon the advice of friends such as R. C. Trench and F. D. Maurice The poem had its origin in this remark of R. C Trench : "Tennyson, we cannot live in art". F. D Maurice had said that the poet "cannot be a scorner, or selfish. or luxurious and sensual". Accordingly the moral of the *The Palace of Art* is the insufficiency of external beauty to ward off the discontent, gradually sinking into despair, that invades a soul when it has planned out a life of God-like isolation among the most perfect of creations—painting, statuary, and architecture.

We get in the poem a picture of a being possessed of the highest intellectual powers, who resolves to spend life in the contemplation of beauty and in aesthetic refinement.

For this purpose he deems it necessary to build a lordly pleasure-house, to store it with all manner of works of art, and to surround it with all the beautiful devices of Nature. Here he may live in seclusion, apart from the race of men. But such a course is contrary to nature, for, "he that shuts Love out, in turn shall be shut out from Love", and find himself cut off from human sympathies. In allegorical terms the palace represents a tower of refuge from the world. In that tower the soul of the poet lives the life of the senses. The soul, living in isolation, cares not for the world but concerns itself only with its "God-like isolation". But she is plagued with sore despair, tires of her solitude, and scorns her life and herself.

The poem may be compared with Browning's *Easter-Day*, in which the soul is taught that it is Hell to be alone, for without God the meaning of everything is gone ; and the man, to whom the whole world of Nature and beauty was given, begs again for the old life of struggle and want.

"This is Tennyson's confession of the beauties of his art, and of the law of its practice : and it is characteristic of the conclusion of the poem that now for the first time he begins that poetry of common human life, of the daily love of child and lover and wife and father and mother, of the ordinary sorrows and joys of men and women, which he wove all his lifelong with so much sweetness, tenderness and power, in home-spun thread and colour, that there is no class of whatever rank and knowledge, who will not take pleasure in it for all time, who will not love him for it". (Stopford Brooke).

In *The Palace of Art*, there is an explicit concern with the predicament of the artist. This explicitness makes the poem a less richly suggestive work than *The Lady of Shalott*, but it is still an interesting and memorable one. The poem tells of the attempt to create a special world of beauty and knowledge, sufficient to satisfy the soul of a sensitive thoughtful man, a world both delightful and secure. Just as the Lady of Shalott saw reality and yet was isolated

and protected from it, so was the soul in its Palace of Art to take notice of everything and be involved in nothing. Art, after all, has within its scope the sum total of man's experience, or the best part of it. The great artists and thinkers are the gods with whom the soul dwells, and there is the additional pleasure of feeling how lucky and superior one is to have their company rather than that of the common people who populate the real world. But this isolation brings its punishment and the soul begins to suffer. The soul becomes neurotic, depressed by the stagnation of its existence : "And death and life she hated equally". So the soul leaves its palace, takes instead a cottage in the outside world hoping to come back perhaps when the guilt of this unnatural and irresponsible way of life is washed away, coming back, moreover, "with other". The love of beauty by and for itself is "a glorious Devil".

The particular form that the dilemma took for Tennyson involved the whole question of his function as an artist, and it also reveals the division of opinion and practice which went right through the nineteenth century. Tennyson turned his back on the Palace of Art, but others found it an increasingly attractive abode. From the 1830's on, the aesthetic movement grew, cultivating Beauty as an end in itself, holding (with Oscar Wilde) that art served no "practical" purpose, and most emphatically denying that the artist had anything whatsoever to do with morality. If Tennyson had joined this movement, *The Palace of Art* would have been written differently : it would then have been a justification of art for art's sake aestheticism rather than the picturesque morality poem that it is. Tennyson would not then have become Poet Laureate, and he would not have written the *Idylls of the King*.

The Palace of Art is explicitly dedicated to the proposition that a life of aesthetic withdrawal is wrong and must be rejected. As F. R. Leavis has observed, however, the celebration of the soul's enjoyment of a rich world of imagination is much more effective as poetry than the pointing of the explicit moral. The poem is interesting as an illustration

of the struggle between Tennyson's desire for a withdrawal from the world and his sense that this was not the proper role for a poet of the nineteenth century.

There is sufficient substance in the charge that, as a moral allegory, *The Palace of Art* is a failure. The major portion of the poem depicts the sensuous pleasures of the soul ; and the moral seems forced and too obviously didactic. As Keats said, we tend to dislike poetry that has too palpable a design on us. The last stanza :

> Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are
> So lightly, beautifully built ;
> Perchance I may return with others there
> When I have purged my guilt.

shows the two-directional pull of the poem. The soul does not want its palace to be destroyed because it will, when purged of its guilt, return there. Tennyson's intention in writing this poem was to examine the question whether the artist can lead an isolated existence in the midst of works of art or whether he must partake of the ordinary human life. But emotionally the question remains unanswered.

THE PALACE OF ART

1 I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house,
Wherein at ease for aye to dwell.
I said, 'O Soul, make merry and carouse,
Dear soul, for all is well'.

2 A huge crag-platform, smooth as burnish'd brass
I chose. The ranged ramparts bright
From level meadow-bases of deep grass
Suddenly scaled the light.

3 Thereon I built it firm. Of ledge or shelf
The rock rose clear, or winding stair.
My soul would live alone unto herself
In her high palace there.

4 And 'while the world runs round and round', I said,
'Reign thou apart, a quiet king,
Still as, while Saturn whirls, his stedfast shade
Sleeps on his luminous ring'.

5 To which my soul made answer readily :
'Trust me, in bliss I shall abide
In this great mansion, that is built for me,
So royal-rich and wide'.

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6 Four courts I made, East, West and South and North,
In each a squared lawn, wherefrom
The golden gorge of dragons spouted forth
"A flood of fountain-foam."

7 And round the cool green courts there ran a row
Of cloisters, branch'd like mighty woods,
Echoing all night to that sonorous flow
Of spouted fountain-floods.

8 And round the roofs a gilded gallery
That lent broad verge to distant lands,
Far as the wild swan wings, to where the sky
Dipt down to sea and sands.

9 From those four jets four currents in one swell
Across the mountain stream'd below
In misty folds, that floating as they fell
Lit up a torrent-bow.

10 And high on every peak a statue seem'd
To hang on tiptoe, tossing up,
A cloud of incense of all odour steam'd
From out a golden cup.

11 So that she thought, 'And who shall gaze upon
My palace with unblinded eyes,
While this great bow will waver in the sun,
And that sweet incense rise'?

12 For that sweet incense rose and never fail'd,
And, while day sank or mounted higher,
The light aerial gallery, golden-rail'd,
Burnt like a fringe of fire.

13 Likewise the deep-set windows, stain'd, and traced,
Would seem slow-flaming crimson fires
From shadow'd grots of arches interlaced,
And tipt with frost-like spires.

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14 Full of long-sounding corridors it was,
That over-vaulted grateful gloom,
Thro' which the livelong day my soul did pass,
Well-pleased, from room to room.

15 Full of great rooms and small the palace stood,
All various, each a perfect whole
From living Nature, fit for every mood
And change of my still soul.

16 For some were hung with arras green and blue
Showing a gaudy summer-morn,
Where with puff'd cheek the belted hunter blew
His wreathed bugle-horn.

17 One seem'd all dark and red—a tract of sand,
And some one pacing there alone,
Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,
Lit with a low large moon.

18 One show'd an iron coast and angry waves.
You seem'd to hear them climb and fall
And roar rock-thwarted under bellowing caves
Beneath the windy wall.

19 And one, a full-fed river winding slow
By herds upon an endless plain,
The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
With shadow-streaks of rain.

20 And one, the reapers at their sultry toil.
In front they bound the sheaves. Behind
Were realms of upland, prodigal in oil,
And hoary to the wind.

21 And one a foreground black with stones and slags,
Beyond, a line of heights, and higher
All barr'd with long white cloud the scornful crags,
And highest, snow and fire.

22 And one, an English home—gray twilight pour'd
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient Peace.

23 Nor these alone, but every landscape fair,
As fit for every mood of mind,
Or gay, or grave, or sweet, or stern, was there
Not less than truth design'd

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24 Or the maid-mother by a crucifix,
In tracts of pasture sunny-warm,
Beneath branch-work of costly sardonyx
Sat smiling, babe in arm.

25 Or in a clear-wall'd city on the sea,
Near gilded organ-pipes, her hair
Wound with white roses, slept St. Cecily;
An angel look'd at her.

26 Or thronging all one porch of Paradise
A group of Houris bow'd to see
The dying Islamite, with hands and eyes
That said, We wait for thee.

27 Or mythic Uther's deeply-wounded son
In some fair space of sloping greens
Lay, dozing in the vale of Avalon,
And watch'd by weeping queens.

28 Or hollowing one hand against his ear,
To list a foot-fall, ere he saw
The wood-nymph, stay'd the Ausonian king to hear
Of wisdom and of law.

29 Or over hills with peaky tops engrail'd,
And many a tract of palm and rice,
The throne of Indian Cama slowly sail'd
A summer fann'd with spice.

30 Or sweet Europa's mantle blew unclasp'd,
From off her shoulder backward borne:
From one hand droop'd a crocus; one hand grasp'd
The mild bull's golden horn.

31 Or else flush'd Ganymede, his rosy thigh
Half-buried in the Eagle's down,
Sole as a flying star shot thro' the sky
Above the pillar'd town.

32 Nor these alone: but every legend fair
Which the supreme Caucasian mind
Carved out of Nature for itself, was there,
Not less than life, design'd.

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33 Then in the towers I placed great bells that swung,
Moved of themselves, with silver sound;
And with choice paintings of wise men I hung
The royal dais round.

34 For there was Milton like a seraph strong,
Beside him Shakespeare bland and mild;
And there the world-worn Dante grasp'd his song,
And somewhat grimly smiled.

35 And there the Ionian father of the rest;
A million wrinkles carved his skin;
A hundred winters snow'd upon his breast,
From cheek and throat and chin.

36 Above, the fair hall-ceiling stately-set
Many an arch high up did lift,
And angels rising and descending met
With interchange of gift.

37 Below was all mosaic choicely plann'd
With cycles of the human tale
Of this wide world, the times of every land
So wrought, they will not fail.

38 The people here, a beast of burden slow,
Toil'd onward, prick'd with goads and stings;
Here play'd, a tiger, rolling to and fro
The heads and crowns of kings;

39 Here rose, an athlete, strong to break or bind
All force in bonds that might endure,
And here once more like some sick man declined,
And trusted any cure.

40 But over these she trod : and those great bells
Began to chime. She took her throne :
She sat betwixt the shining Oriels,
To sing her songs alone.

41 And thro' the topmost Oriels' coloured flame
Two godlike faces gazed below;
Plato the wise, and large-brow'd Verulam,
The first of those who know.

42 And all those names, that in their motion were
Full-welling fountain-heads of change,
Betwixt the slender shafts were blazon'd fair
In diverse raiment strange :

43 Thro' which the lights, rose, amber, emerald, blue,
Flush'd in her temples and her eyes,
And from her lips, as morn from Memnon, drew
Rivers of melodies.

44 No nightingale delighteth to prolong
Her low preamble all alone,
More than my soul to hear her echo'd song
Throb thro' the ribbed stone ;

45 Singing and murmuring in her feastful mirth,
Joying to feel herself alive,
Lord over Nature, Lord of the visible earth,
Lord of the senses five ;

46 Communing with herself : 'All these are mine,
And let the world have peace or wars,
'Tis one to me.' She—when young night divine
Crown'd dying day with stars,

47 Making sweet close of his delicious toils—
Lit light in wreaths and anadems,
And pure quintessences of precious oils
In hollow'd moons of gems,

48 To mimic heaven; and clapt her hands and cried,
'I marvel if my still delight
In this great house so royal-rich, and wide,
Be flatter'd to the height.

49 'O all things fair to sate my various eyes!
O shapes and hues that please me well!
O silent faces of the Great and Wise,
My Gods, with whom I dwell!

50 'O God-like isolation which art mine,
I can but count thee perfect gain,
What time I watch the darkening droves of swine
That range on yonder plain.

51 'In filthy sloughs they roll a prurient skin,
They graze and wallow, breed and sleep;
And oft some brainless devil enters in,
And drives them to the deep.'

52 Then of the moral instinct would she prate
And of the rising from the dead,
As hers by right of full-accomplish'd Fate;
And at the last she said:

53 'I take possession of man's mind and deed.
I care not what the sects may brawl.
I sit as God holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all.'

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54 Full oft the riddle of the painful earth
Flash'd thro' her as she sat alone,
Yet not the less held she her solemn mirth,
And intellectual throne.

55 And so she throve and prosper'd : so three years
She prosper'd : on the fourth she fell,
Like Herod, when the shout was in his ears,
Struck thro' with pangs of hell.

56 Lest she should fail and perish utterly,
God, before whom ever lie bare
The abysmal deeps of Personality,
Plagued her with sore despair.

57 When she would think, where'er she turn'd her sight
The airy hand confusion wrought,
Wrote, 'Mene, mene,' and divided quite
The kingdom of her thought.

58 Deep dread and loathing of her solitude
Fell on her, from which mood was born
Scorn of herself ; again, from out that mood
Laughter at her self-scorn.

59 'What ! is not this my place of strength,' she said,
'My spacious mansion built for me,
Whereof the strong foundation-stones were laid
Since my first memory ?'

60 But in dark corners of her palace stood
Uncertain shapes ; and unawares
On white-eyed phantasms weeping tears of blood,
And horrible nightmares,

61 And hollow shades enclosing hearts of flame,
And, with dim fretted foreheads all,
On corpses three-months-old at noon she came,
That stood against the wall.

62 A spot of dull stagnation, without light
Or power of movement, seem'd my soul,
'Mid onward-sloping motions infinite
Making for one sure goal.

63 A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand,
Left on the shore ; that hears all night
The plunging seas draw backward from the land
Their moon-led waters white.

64 A star that with the choral starry dance
Join'd not, but stood, and standing saw
The hollow orb of moving Circumstance
Roll'd round by one fix'd law.

65 Back on herself her serpent pride had curl'd.
'No voice,' she shriek'd in that lone hall,
'No voice breaks thro' the stillness of this world :
One deep, deep silence all !'

65 She, mouldering with the dull earth's mouldering sod,
Inwrapt tenfold in slothful shame,
Lay there exiled from eternal God,
Lost to her place and name ;

67 And death and life she hated equally,
And nothing saw, for her despair,
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,
No comfort anywhere ;

68 Remaining utterly confused with fears,
And ever worse with growing time,
And ever unrelieved by dismal tears,
And all alone in crime :

69 Shut up as in a crumbling tomb, girt round
With blackness as a solid wall,
Far off she seem'd to hear the dully sound
Of human footsteps fall.

70 As in strange lands a traveller walking slow,
In doubt and great perplexity,
A little before moon-rise hears the low
Moan of an unknown sea ;

71 And knows not if it be thunder, or a sound
Of rocks thrown down, or one deep cry
Of great wild beasts; then thinketh, 'I have found
A new land, but I die.'

72 She howl'd aloud, 'I am on fire within.
There comes no murmur of reply.
What is it that will take away my sin,
And save me lest I die?'

73 So when four years were wholly finished,
She threw her royal robes away.
'Make me a cottage in the vale,' she said,
'Where I may mourn and pray.

74 'Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are
So lightly, beautifully built:
Perchance I may return with others there
When I have purged my guilt.'

PARAPHRASE

Stanza 1. I built for my soul a mansion to which she might retire for recreation and pleasure, and live there in ease and comfort for ever. I said to her, "O Soul, come in here, and be merry and eat and drink, as every thing is quite all right".

Stanza 2. For the site of the mansion I selected the level summit of a huge rock which was as smooth as well polished brass. *Lines* of perpendicular rock, like the walls of a fortress, *shone* brightly and shot sheer up into the open sky from the grassy plain below.

Stanza 3. On that site I built it strong and firm. The sides of the rock were unbroken by any narrow projection or shelf and so afforded no foothold for a climber, nor could be used as a winding-stair. At that time I thought that

my soul would live in solitude in her palace, built so high above the ground.

Stanza 4. Then I said to my soul, "Rule in this palace like a king in calm supremacy and solitude till the world lasts, remaining as motionless as the shadow of Saturn which stands still in the bright ring surrounding the planet, which rotates on its axis with great speed".

Stanza 5. On hearing this my soul replied at once: "Rest assured, I shall live in great happiness in this very large house which is built solely for me, and is so vast and palace-like".

Stanza 6. The palace was built in perfectly symmetrical shape, wherein I had four courts built, on the East, West, South and North corners, and each had a square lawn in which fountains shaped like golden images of dragons spouted from their throats foamy water in great quantity.

Stanza 7. And around the cool and green courts there were lines of arched passages which, springing from the pillars, spread overhead like huge trees of the woods whose branches join together to make a roof. These arched passages reverberated with the melodious sound of the streams of water flowing from the spouts of the fountains in a flood-like manner.

Stanza 8. Then there were galleries ornamented with golden paintings, which presented a wide prospect reaching the far-off lands, as far distant as the swan flew or the sky seemed to slope downwards till it joined the low line of sea and sand at the horizon.

Stanza 9. From those four fountains four streams of water ran with full force across the mountain down to the ground below, throwing off wreaths of vapourous spray which wavered slowly down and glittered with the prismatic colours of rainbow.

Stanza 10. There a was statue on every pinnacle which seemed to poise itself on tiptoe to keep the balance, and

sent forth a cloud of sweet smelling perfume steaming out of a golden cup, (which the statue held in its hands).

Stanza 11. Having surveyed the palace silently, the soul thought, "Who is there that can gaze upon my palace and not be dazzled, as long as this great rainbow is glittering and trembling in the sun's light and that cloud of sweet smelling perfume continues to rise ?"

Stanza 12. My soul thought so because the sweet perfume rose continuously without a break, and in the glow of the setting or the rising sun the aerie-like gallery with golden railings blazed like a border of fire to the amazement of every one who looked on it.

Stanza 13. In the same way, the windows, which were sunk deep into the thickness of the wall and were filled with stained or coloured glass, seemed to be burning with a still and steady light and resembled the crimson (deep red) glow of a steady flame, coming from dim recesses, where the arches forming the framework of the windows intersected each other and were over-canopied by carved mouldings that tapered up to the fine points, like the ice-pinnacles seen on snow-clad mountains.

Stanza 14. The palace had many corridors which resounded for a long time (with the sound of footsteps) and whose arched roofs created a pleasant twilight below. Through these corridors my soul passed all day long from one room to another being much pleased and satisfied.

Stanza 15. The palace had many rooms, some great and some small, all separate, and each one complete in itself, containing a complete representation of some piece of natural scenery, and in harmony with every mood and change of my soul which sat in passive contemplation.

Stanza 16. Some of these rooms were decorated with arras (tapestry covering the walls) with paintings showing a summer morning in deep and brilliant colours, that of the earth being green and of the sky blue, at their brightest,

and a hunter wearing a belt, with cheeks breathing out air, blew his curved bugle, made of a horn.

Stanza 17. One of these tapestry coverings looked entirely dark as if it were a tract of sand, and some body was walking there alone, and this person walked to and fro continuously on a faintly shining piece of ground which received its light from the moon which was just rising and so looking of great size.

Stanza 18. Another displayed the sea coast edged with rocks as with a wall of iron, and one could hear the howling waves of the sea as they rose and fell, and since the waves were broken by the rock they roared and moved under the noisy caves which were at the foot of the wind-swept wall of the rock.

Stanza 19. And one represented a river with its full share of water, flowing slowly in a zig-zag manner, and herds of cattle grazing on an extensive plain which seemed to be without any limits, a thunder-cloud with jagged edges louring (looking dark and threatening) on the horizon and showing stripes of shadows caused by falling showers.

Stanza 20. And in one, we see the reapers of hay labouring in hot and close weather. They have bound the hay in sheaves which are lying in front of them. Behind them are wide stretches of rising ground bearing rich plantations of olive trees (which produce oil), now changing from a green to a gray tint as the wind turned up to the ash coloured underside of olive leaves.

Stanza 21. And in the forefront of one was a spot which had turned black with stones and volcanic cinders (lava), and in the background was a line of rocks, and behind them higher rocks, all being for-bidden ground for human beings, with a long white cloud trailing over, and dangerously steep rocks deriding man's power to climb them, and above all snow-clad peaks and flaming volcanoes.

Stanza 22. And one depicted an English home—the soft hues of evening poured on pastures and trees bathed in

dew, the whole atmosphere mild and calm beyond description—all things arranged in order, where peace had dwelt undisturbed for ages.

Stanza 23. There were not only those pictures described above, but also pictures of every beautiful natural scenery, which suited every mood of mind, merry or serious, sweet or harsh, were there, pictured with exact fidelity to nature.

Stanza 24. Or, Virgin Mary, as portrayed in one of the pictures, was sitting with a smile playing on her lips and holding her baby in her arms, under an arched canopy of the precious sardonyx stone in the midst of a sunny pastoral landscape.

Stanza 25. Or, (in another picture) St. Cecily was shown sleeping, in a city on the sea coast, with walls rising in distinct outline, her golden organ-pipes (which she had invented and played on them exceedingly well) lying by her side, her hair entwined with white roses (brought by an angel from paradise) and an angel keeping watch on her.

Stanza 26. Or, another picture depicted a band of Houris, gathered together in Paradise in a posture of bending their bodies towards the earth to look at a Muslim on the point of death, with outsretched hands to receive him, and with eyes beckoning him welcome, telling him that they were waiting for him.

Stanza 27. Or one could see, in a picture, (the legendary King Arthur) Uther's, son seriously wounded and lying unconscious somewhere in undulating meadowland in the valley of Avelon, and three queens watched him and wept for him.

Stanza 28. Or, one picture alluded to the King of Ausonia who was shown as anxiously waiting for some one, having placed one hand against his ear to catch the sound of the footsteps, before the goddess of the woods arrived,

from whom he wished to hear lessons in wisdom and statecraft.

Stanza 29. Or, one picture portrayed the throne of the Indian King Camadeva slowly sailing over the hills with indented peaks, and many fields of rice and groves of palms, across the summer sky wafted by spicy breezes.

Stanza 30. Or, yet another picture showed the beautiful maiden *Europa* (carried away by Jupiter in the *guise* of a bull) with her loose garment fluttering backward from off her shoulder, and she had in one hand a crocus (a spring flower) and by the other held fast the *docile* bull's horn of gold.

Stanza 31. Or, a Greek mythological legend was portrayed, showing the beautiful boy Ganymede blushing, and his soft thigh half concealed in the Eagle's soft feathers, while he swiftly passed through the sky above the town of pillars (probably Troy) like a shooting star.

Stanza 32. There were not only these legends portrayed in pictures, but also all the beautiful myths which the great Caucasian artist had invented as allegorical expressions of some great truth existing in nature, pictured so as exactly to represent the living object, were represented there.

Stanza 33. (Having decorated the palace with paintings) I placed big bells in every tower which were set in motion by their own power (moved automatically) and produced melodious sound. And around the dais (raised platform with a canopy) built in royal fashion I hung the pictures of wise and learned men.

Stanza 34. Among the paintings of the wise men were those of Milton, an angel with a "power of sustained flights (of far reaching vision, of lofty eloquence)", Shakespeare of kindly and sympathetic nature, and also Dante with a melancholy and careworn face, holding a book (of his songs) in his hand and a cheerless smile playing on his lips.

Stanza 35. And there was also a painting representing Homer the "father of verse" and of all (dramatic) poets, so old that there were innumerable wrinkles on his body. He had lived for more than a hundred years so that the hair on his breast, chin, cheek and throat had all turned white. (He is generally represented as a very old man with a long beard and wrinkled face).

Stanza 36. And on the beautiful ceiling of the hall, majestically poised, and raised on high and lofty arches, "Jacob's Ladder" was pictured, and the angels of God ascended and descended on it, carrying offerings of prayer and praise from man to God and bringing blessings down from heaven to earth.

Stanza 37. And below, the pavement, was beautifully and artistically decorated with representations of those sets or series of historical events of the world and every country, that occur in the case of every nation (as it develops) and they were made with such care that they might never decay or wear away. (That is "the struggles of the human race in its endeavour to assert the rights of manhood are recognised only so far as they serve to supply graceful pictorial devices, which are made to ornament the pavement under the feet as though unworthy of serious attention").

Stanza 38. (These pictures represented the successive stages in the history of mankind, *e.g.* the French people before and after revolution). Here people or the general public were shown working hard for their masters as though they were no better than beasts ; they worked hard under threats of torture. Side by side were the pictures (of the Reign of Terror) in which tigers were represented killing Kings and overthrowing Kingdoms.

Stanza 39. In these pictures was shown a strongly built man with enough strength to crush or to fetter in bonds of violence of despots which had deprived the people of their freedom and rights, and also a sick man reclining

on his bed hoping that some medicine would cure him. (It might refer to the Turkish Empire, then called "The sick man of Europe'').

Stanza 40. Over these pictures (of struggles of mankind) my soul paced to and fro (disregarding them altogether as though they deserved no notice) and those big bells in the towers began to chime. Just then she took her seat on the throne designed for her, between two shining windows and began to sing her songs with no one by her side.

Stanza 41. And in the uppermost windows with coloured glasses shining like flames, there were painted two divine faces which seemed to look below, towards the pavement; these were the faces of Plato the wise and Verulam (Viscount Francis Bacon—Baron Verulam) with broad forehead. They were the two greatest philosophers.

Stanza 42. And all those famous persons and great thinkers who by their speculations and discoveries opened up new sources of knowledge and changed the course of human progress, were portrayed on the thin stone columns forming the framework of windows. They were represented as wearing various and strange dresses.

Stanza 43. Through these windows came light in various colours as yellow, green, blue and shone in her temples and eyes, and from her lips flowed continuous streams of sweet music like the melodious strains coming, in the morning from the statue of Memnon, (a statue of an ancient Egyptian King near Thebes in Egypt, supposed to emit a sound like the twanging of a chord struck by the rays of the rising sun).

Stanza 44 No nightingale was ever more pleased by its own mild and preliminary tunes and sung them longer, than my soul by hearing her songs reverberating or pulsating along the vaulted roof whose arches and mouldings were curved like ribs.

Stanza 45. Thus my "soul" continued to sing and murmur in her festive cheerfulness and felt happy on being alive (though all alone), thinking herself to have complete mastery over all Science and secrets of the Universe and in full possession of the avenues (senses) by which knowledge is acquired.

Stanza 46—48. Talking to herself she said, "All these things are mine, and if there is peace or war in the world it does not matter to me in the least." My soul then—like the fresh night becoming the ruler of the universe and crowned with the stars, at the end of the declining day which has brought to a pleasant conclusion its delightful occupations—lit light in lamps, arranged in clusters and festoons, which were provided with the purest extracts of valuable oils and looked like transparent gems, hollowed out to contain the oil and shaped like the moon, to imitate heaven (having been provided with a ceiling resembling the starlit sky); and seeing this marvellous result clapped her hands in joy and said "I wonder whether my passive enjoyment of beauty is capable of further addition or extension" (that is, can no more be added or extended).

Stanza 49. My soul further said, "There are in ths palace all the beautiful things to satisfy my different moods of contemplation. All these portraits and fine colours are so pleasing to my eyes! O you great learned and wise men, whose portraits are here and are now so silent! You are to me like gods in whose company I am living now"!

Stanza 50. O my *loneliness*; You who are like the isolation of God, are my property and I can now trust you as being perfectly beneficial to me, and when I look below and see at a distance herds of swine which look like a stain on the landscape as they wander in the plain which lies stretched before me (I feel a pride in placing myself at this great height).

Stanza 51. These herds of swine find pleasure in rolling over and over in muddy land as their skins are always

itching for such dirty pranks, there they graze and roll about in mire, beget their offsprings and sleep. Sometimes it happens that some foolish, evil spirit enters into the herd and by a silly act leads them to the sea to be drowned. [The reference is to the biblical story : "And the unclean spirit entered into the swine, and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea (they were about two thousand) and were choked in the sea''. (Bible Mark V. 13)].

Stanza 52 & 53. Then the soul fondly talks of the higher instincts and of the desire for a life beyond the grave (which are commonly shared by all human beings) as if they were a peculiar possession of her own, which she had acquired by the natural process of evolution (Fate), and concludes her speech by saying : "I claim as my own the results of all human progress. I do not care for any form of religious belief, no matter what the followers of various creeds and faiths fight for, because like God, I am bound by no rituals of any faith and sitting in this palace I brood over the different creeds (and none is in harmony with me).''

Stanza 54. Often the unexplained problem of life on this sorrowful earth crossed her mind for a moment as she sat alone, still it did not slacken her happiness solemnly promised to her and she did not like to come down from the spiritual throne she was elevated to.

Stanza 55. In this way she passed three years in happiness and (apparent) prosperity : in the fourth year she fell from her elevated mental state. Her example can be compared with that of Herod, who, when shouts of approval of his oration from his audience were still ringing in his ears, was smitten by an angel (for not praising God), and died to be thrown in the hell to suffer remorse and despair, (For the story, see the Bible Acts, xii 21-23).

Stanza 56. In order that her failure might not bring about her total destruction, God who knows the hidden secrets of each man's nature, his qualities and faculties,

buried far below the surface, tormented her with the feeling of hopelessness.

Stanza 57. When she wished to resume her pensive contemplation, she saw that some mysterious power (airy hand) intervened and threw her mental faculties in confusion. She saw the words "Mene, Mene" written on the walls on every side, and this was a sign that the Kingdom of her contemplation was divided. [The reference is to the biblical story of King Belshazzar's feast, when the fingers of a man's hand wrote on the wall Mene, Mene .....(meaning : "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting, thy Kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persian"). (Bible Daniel V.)].

Stanza. 58. Now a feeling of great fear and hatred of her lonely life began to unfold itself with the knowledge that she was *alone* and this mood created in her mind feelings of disdain towards herself. But in a short time those feelings subsided and she began to laugh at her foolishness of hating herself.

Stanza 59. Reconsidering her position, she said to herself. "Is not this palace a source of strength to me, this large house built solely for my comfort, about which I had always the impression that its foundations, from the very beginning and since I first began to remember, seemed immovable ?"

Stanza 60-61. But (there were not only the beautiful pictures in her palace), there were also in hidden corners which received no light (and so could not be seen before) unidentified images, unknown white-eyed spirits of dead persons, weeping tears of blood, and many other ghastly dreams, and also strange spirits of the dead with their hearts engulfed in flames, and their dark foreheads eaten by worms. She came across, at noon, such corpses of persons who had died three months before, propped up against the wall which sustained them.

Stanza 62. Suddenly my soul was startled into a knowledge that she was the only thing left in stagnation without change or progress, while the entire human race was moving forward from lower to higher conditions, without ever stopping and always having in view their goal with confidence to attain it.

Stanza 63. She seemed like a stagnant salt-water pool enclosed on all sides by sand, with rocks on the sea-side too strong to penetrate, and left there uncared for near the coast. This pool hears all night the noise of the high tide receding backward from the land on account of the influence of the moon (but cannot meet it).

Stanza 64 One planet *i.e.* the earth (or the world of my soul) among other planets, did not join in their choral dance but stood aloof and saw that the surrounding sphere of heaven moved with regularity of motion in accordance with the laws of Nature. (In other words, all the world was advancing in accordance with the laws of Nature but only my *soul* was standing still).

Stanza 65. But seeing this general advance her pride in her isolation was turned into stinging remorse. She exclaimed in horror in that solitary hall, saying that it was unbearable that no sound could be heard to break the grave-like stillness of that world of hers and, in despair, remarked how unfathomably deep the silence was.

Stanza 66. My soul felt that she was gradually rotting just as the surface of the earth decays to dust, and was covered all over with shame on account of passing her days in doing nothing, and having been turned away from (the blessings of) God, she lay there, leaving her proper sphere empty, and her life's duties unfulfilled.

Stanza 67. Now she hated her slothful life as much as she hated death, and because of the despair she felt, she saw no other thing except a life of misery in this world and the next, without getting comfort anywhere.

Stanza 68-69. Completely perplexed by her ever-growing fears and continuously growing worse with the passage of time, weeping desperately and getting no relief from anywhere she lay in solitude, conscious of her guilt (of shunning human society), and in desperation she shut herself up in a decaying tomb surrounded by impenetrable darkness, when she felt as if she heard the sound of human feet walking silently at a long distance from her (*i.e.* she becomes vaguely conscious of the human world outside her isolated palace).

Stanza 70-71. Just as a deserted traveller walking slowly and pensively in a foreign country, in a state of doubt and confusion (as to whether he is following the right path), hears the moaning sound of the sea, he is not aware of, a little before the moon rises, does not know whether the sound is that of thunder or of the rocks rolling down or perhaps the united roar of the great beasts of the forest. Then he says to himself, "Although I am on the land though it is unknown to me, yet death awaits me (because I cannot find shelter anywhere)".

Stanza 72. In a like manner the soul finding herself deserted shouted at the top of her voice. "A fire (burning sense of remorse) is consuming my heart. Ah! there comes no answer to my call, not even the faintest sound! I wonder if there is any thing that will absolve me of my sins and save me from a miserable death".

Stanza 73. Thus after passing full four years of her life (which included one year of despair), she discard·d her princely dress and abandoning her pride, said in all humility, "Build for me a cottage in the valley so that I may repent for my sins and pray for my salvation".

Stanza 74. She further said, "Do not dismantle the towers of my palace which have been so gracefully built, because I do not intend to leave the palace for good. It is quite possible that when I have atoned for my sins and cleaned my soul I may return to it (not alone but) with others also who will share its comforts with me".

NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS

3. **carouse**, feast ; derived from Ger. *garaus*, right out, used of emptying a bumper to anyone's health.

5. **huge crag-platform**, level summit of a huge rock.

6. **ranged ramparts**, lines of perpendicular rock, like the walls of a fort.

8. **Suddenly scaled the light**, shot sheer up into the open sky from the grassy plain below.

9. **of ledge** etc., with its sides unbroken by ledge or shelf, and so affording no foothold for a climber.

11. **would live.** The past tense 'would' points to the thought as it existed in the mind of the speaker: 'at the time of building I thought that it would'.

14. **a quiet king**, in calm supremacy.

15. **Still as, while Saturn whirls** etc. The shadow of Saturn thrown upon the bright ring that surrounds the planet appears motionless, though the body of the planet revolves. Saturn rotates on its axis in the short period of 10½ hours, but the shadow of this swiftly whirling mass shows no more motion than is seen in the shadow of a top spinning so rapidly that it seems to be standing still or 'sleeping'. This passage is often quoted as an example of Tennyson's accurate realistion of scientfic facts.

18. **Trust me**, rest assured.

20. **royal-rich.** An instance of Tennyson's use of alliteration in his double words ; in this poem we have also

'fountain-foam', 'fountain-flood', 'full-fed', 'shadow-streaks', 'maid-mother', 'world-worn'.

21. Four courts etc. The palace was built in a perfectly symmetrical shape, indicating the equal culture of each separate department of Art. With the whole of this description may be compared Bacon's plan of a "perfect palace" in his Essay *Of Building*. Bacon's palace is to have "fair courts" and "stately galleries", with "fine coloured windows"; it is to be "cloistered on all sides", and to have "an open gallery upon pillars, to take the prospect and freshness of the garden", with "some fountains running in divers places from the wall".

23. The golden gorge etc., *i.e.* fountains shaped like golden images of dragons spouted water from their throats.

26. cloiosters, arched passages—from L. *claustra,* from *clausum,* shut in: literally 'enclosures,' hence 'places of religious seclusion,' hence 'arched passages' such as are often found in monasteries or cathedrals. **branch'd like mighty woods.** The lines of the arches overhead, springing from the pillars, resembled the branches of huge trees, springing from their trunks and uniting so as to form a roof. See Ruskin on Naturalism in Gothic architecture, *The Stones of Venice,* ii. 6, 70, "Gradually...the stony pillar grew slender and the vaulted roof grew light, till they had wreathed themselves into the semblance of the summer woods at their fairest."

30. lent broad verge etc., presented a wide prospect reaching to far-off lands. *Verge* is several times used by Tennyson in the sense of 'horizon'; cf. *The Princess,* vii. 23, "the slope of sea from verge to shore"; also *ib.* iv. 29, a sail that sinks "below the verge," and *The Gardener's Daughter,* 79, "May from verge to verge." *Verge,* in this sense, is derived from L. *uirga,* 'a rod or wand of office,' hence 'the limits within which an office is exercised,' hence 'a limit, boundary, horizon.' It seems here to mean 'circle bounded bythe horizon,' 'range of view.'

32. **Dipt down to sea and sands,** seemed to slope downwards till it joined the low line of sea and sand at the horizon.

33. **swell,** full stream.

35. **In misty folds** etc., throwing off wreaths of vaporous spray which wavered slowly down and glittered with the prismatic colours of the rainbow. Cf. the description of falling streams in *The Lotos-Eaters*, 10, 11 :—

> . . . "some like a downward smoke
> Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go,"

and *The Princess*, vi. 198 : "wreaths of dangling water-smoke."

36. **torrent-bow.** Cf. *The Vision of Sin*, ii. 9, "Flung the torrent rainbow round". In *Œnone*, 60, we find "foam-bow".

37. **peak,** pinnacle, slender turret. The roof of the Cathedral of Milan is thus ornamented with statues on every pinnacle : cf. the description of it in *The Daisy*, 64, 65 :—

> "I stood among the silent statues
> And statued pinnacles—"

38. **To hang on tiptoe,** to poise itself on tiptoe, as does the famous statue of Mercury by Giovanni da Bologna, at Florence.

39. **steam'd,** 'made to steam,' and so equivalent to 'steaming, rising like steam.' This use of the participle in *-ed*, where modern English employs the participle in *-ing*, is very common in Elizabethan English. See Abbott, *Shaks. Gram.*, para 374, and Schmidt, *Shaks. Lexicon*, p. 1417.

41. **And who** etc. The word 'and' implies that the thought expressed in the text is an addition to a series of

thoughts in the mind; the Soul has been silently surveying the palace, and at last concludes with these words.

42. **unblinded,** without being dazzled by the tremulous bow and the ever-rising clouds of incense.

46. **while day sank** etc., in the glow of the setting or the rising sun.

49. **deep-set,** sunk deep into the thickness of the wall. **stain'd,** filled with stained or coloured glass; cf. "Oriels' colour'd flame," l. 161, below, and Milton, *Il Penseroso,* 159, "storied windows, richly dight," **traced,** *i.e.* with its mullions (the slender pillars which hold the glass) branching out into arches and curves of ornamental stonework.

50. **slow-flaming,** burning with a still and steady light. The light shining upon the coloured glass resembled the crimson glow of a steady flame.

51. **From shadow'd grots** etc., coming from dim recesses, where the arches forming the framework of the windows intersected each other (as is often seen in Gothic windows).

52. **tipt with frost-like spires.** The window arches were over-canopied by carved mouldings that tapered up to fine points, like the ice-pinnacles seen on snow-clad mountains. Cf. *In Memoriam,* cxxvii. 16:

"The spires of ice are toppled down,"

and *The Princess,* vii. 182, "a star upon the sparkling spire."

54. **That over-vaulted grateful gloom,** whose arched roofs created a pleasant twilight below: 'over-vaulted' is a transitive verb. Cf. *Recollections of the Arabian Nights,* 126, "the hollow-vaulted dark."

58. **each a perfect** etc., each containing a complete representation of some piece of natural scenery.

59. **fit for,** suited to, in harmony with.

60. still, sitting in passive contemplation: cf. ll. 13-16, above.

61. arras, tapestry covering the walls; from Arras, a town in the north of France, where it was first made; cf. *calico*, (from Calicut), *muslin* (from Mosul), and *sardonyx*, l. 95. **green and blue,** colours of earth and sky at their brightest.

62. gaudy, depicted in brilliant colouring. With the glad activity, buoyant life, and bright colouring of this picture, contrast the dark desolation and gloomy mystery of the succeeding one.

64. wreathed, curved. Pronounce *wreathed*. **bugle-horn,** literally 'wild ox horn,' from O. F. *bugle*, a wild ox, Lat. *buculus*, dim. of *bos*.

68. low large moon. The moon when just rising above the horizon seems of great size.

69. iron, iron-bound, edged with rocks as with a wall of iron.

71. rock-thwarted, since they were broken by the rocky barrier.

72. windy wall, the wind-swept wall of rock: cf. *Ulysses*. 17, "windy Troy." The noisy struggle and convulsive effort typified in this stormy scene may be contrasted with the stillness and peace of the next picture.

75. ragged rims etc., a thunder-cloud with jagged edges, louring on the horizon. Upon this scene and the preceding one Bayne (*Lessons from My Masters*) remarks: "Any artist who is master of his business could put these pictures upon canvas; but I feel sure that Turner, austere critic as he was, would have confessed that he could not paint them more truthfully than Tennyson has painted them in words. Even Turner's pictures must have been dumb; but we *hear* the waves roaring rock-thwarted under the bellowing caves."

76. **shadow-streaks of rain**, stripes of shadow caused by falling showers.

79. **realms of upland**, wide stretches of rising ground. **prodigal in oil**, bearing rich plantations of olive trees.

80. **hoary to the wind**, changing from a green to a gray tint as the wind turned up the ash-coloured under-side of the olive leaves. Cf. *In Memoriam*, lxxii. 3, "blasts that blow the poplar white"; also *The Lady of Shalott*, 10, "Willows whiten."

From a contemplation of this scene of man's labour rewarded by the kindly fruits of the earth, the mind passes on to a cold and barren scene, hostile to man's exertion.

81. **slags**, volcanic cinders, lava; from the same root as *slack*, originally meaning 'fluid', hence 'the dross and cinders that flow from metal in smelting'; hence 'lava flowing from a volcano.'

83. **scornful crags**. The rough, steep rock, barren and inaccessible, seemed haughtily to deride the feeble powers of man.

84. **snow and fire**, snow-clad peaks and flaming volcanoes.

85. **And one** etc. The series of ideal scenes of joyous life and of gloomy solitude, of the war of the elements and of nature at rest, of earth rewarding man's toil and again defying his efforts, concludes with a picture of ordered, quiet life, undisturbed by toil, bathed in the soft hues of evening.

87. **Softer than sleep**. Cf. Shelley, *Arethusa*, 15, "murmurs as soft as sleep"; also Theocritus, *Idyl*. xv. 125, and Vergil, *Eclog*. vii, 45, '*somno mollior herba*.'

88. **A haunt of ancient Peace**, where Peace has dwelt undisturbed for ages. 90. **fit for** etc. See l. 59, above.

92. **Not less than truth design'd**, pictured with exact fidelity to nature; cf. l. 128, below. Cf. Shelley, *The Recollection*, ll. 77, 78, "every leaf and lineament With more than truth exprest."

93. The moods suggested by local scenery are followed by those arising from contemplation of historic or legendary actions and incidents, such as frequently form the subjects of pictures. **maid-mother**, the Virgin Mary.

94. **In tracts** etc., in the midst of a sunny pastoral landscape, such as was often painted as a background in pictures of the Holy Family by the old Italian masters.

95. **Beneath branch-work**, etc., under an arched shrine or canopy of sardonyx stone. Several pictures of the "Madonna and Child" by Raphael represent them as enthroned under a carved canopy. The sardonyx gets its name from *Sardis*, in Asia Minor, where it is said to have been first found (cf. l. 61), and Gk. a nail, its colour resembling that of the finger-nail.

96. **babe in arm.** A phrase like "sword in hand." Cf. *The Princess*, vi. 15 :—

> "But high upon the palace Ida stood
> With Psyche's babe in arm."

97. **clear-wall'd**, with walls rising in distinct outline : in contrast to the wide sweep of landscape forming the background of the last picture. See Rossetti's illustration of this scene in the 1864 edition of Tennyson's poems.

98. **organ-pipes.** St. Cecilia, or Cecily, was said to have invented the organ : her musical skill was so exquisite, the legends tell us, that an angel fell in love with her and nightly brought her white roses from Paradise : she suffered martyrdom in A.D. 220. See Dryden, *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, 52-54 :—

> "When to her organ vocal breath was given,
> An angel heard, and straight appear'd,
> Mistaking earth for heaven."

There are famous pictures of St. Cecilia by Raphael and by Van Eyck.

99. Wound, entwined.

102. Houris, the virgins of Paradise who, according to the teaching of the Koran, are to tend the faithful Mussulman in Paradise. **bow'd,** bent towards earth.

103. Islamite, from Arabic *islam*, obedience to God's will. **with hands** etc., with their hands outstretched to receive him and looks of welcome in their eyes.

105. mythic Uther's deeply-wounded son. Arthur, founder of the Round Table, was said to be the son of Uther Pendragon, a legendary king or chief of the Britons. In his Idyll of *The Passing of Arthur* Tennyson describes how Arthur after having been "smitten through the helm" by the traitor Modred in his last great battle, is carried away by three queens, who lament over him, to "the island-valley of Avilion," to be healed of his wound. Avalon, Avelion, or Avilion is supposed to have been the name of a valley in an island of the river near Glastonbury in Somersetshire. But many of the early romances make it an ocean-island, and in medieval legends it becomes a sort of earthly Paradise whither the favourites of the Gods were conveyed without dying, corresponding to the "Island of the Blest", the "Fortunate Islands" of the Greek and Roman mythology. 'Avalon' is said to mean literally 'Isle of Apples,' from Breton *aval*, an apple.

106. sloping greens, undulating meadowland. The indefiniteness of 'fair space' is like that of 'a great water' in *Morte d'Arthur*, 12.

110. To list, to listen for the sound of.

111. The wood-nymph. Egeria, a wood-nymph of the forest of Aricia, was supposed to have instructed Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, in all the arts of government. Cf. *The Princess*, ii. 65 ; "She that taught the

Sabine how to rule". Numa was a Sabine of the city of Cures. **the Ausonian king.** 'Ausonia' was an ancient name of Campania, from Auson, son of Ulysses, and the name was afterwards used (especially by Vergil, who was an antiquarian) of the whole of Italy during its mythical period. The original reading in this passage was "the Tuscan king." **to hear** etc., to listen to lessons in statecraft.

113. **engrail'd**, indented, serrated ; an heraldic term.

115. **Indian Cama**, Camadev, or Camadeo, the Cupid or God of Love of Hindu Mythology. He is represented as riding across the sky on the back of a lory or parrot accompanied by the cuckoo, the humming-bee, and other signs of springtide : cf. Southey, *The Curse of Kehama*, x. 19 :—

"'Twas Camadeo riding on his lory".

sail'd a summur etc., floated across the summer sky wafted by spicy breezes.

117. **Europa**, the beautiful maiden who, according to classic story, while gathering flowers was carried off across the sea by Jupiter, under the form of a bull of gentle demeanour. **blew**. The reading of some earlier editions, was, by a misprint, '**blue**'. This description is parallel to the description of Moschus, *Ibyl.* ii. 125 etc. :—

"But she upon the ox-like back of Zeus
Sitting, with one hand held the bull's great horn,
And with the other her garment's purple fold
Drew upward that the infinite hoary spray
Of the salt ocean might not drench it through ;
The while Europa's mantle by the winds
Was filled and swollen like a vessel's sail
Buoying the maiden onward". (Steadman.)

121. **flush'd Ganymede.** Greek myths relate that Ganymede, a beautiful boy, was carried off by the eagle of Zeus that he might become cup-bearer and favourite of the

king of the Gods. **flush'd**, blushing. There is a picture by Titian of the Rape of Ganymede in the National Gallery, London.

124. the pillar'd town. Probably Troy is intended where the pillars of the temples would be conspicuous features. Ganymede, according to some accounts, was carried off from Mt. Ida : see Horace, *Odes*, iii. 20, 15 ; *aquosa Raptus ab Ida*, 'snatched up from watery Ida'.

126. supreme Caucasian mind. *Caucasian* was an epithet formerly used in ethnology to designate the races now known as Indo-European, supposed to be highest type of humanity. The cradle of this race was believed to be in or near Mt. Caucasus.

127. Carved out of Nature for itself, invented as an allegorical expression of some great truth existing in Nature. Myths generally originated from natural phenomena.

128. Not less than life, design'd, pictured so as exactly to represent the living object. Cf. l. 92, above.

130. Moved of themselves, being set in motion by their own power, automatically.

131. Choice paintings of wise men. With Tennyson's pictures may be compared the gallery of portraits painted by Mrs. E. B. Browning in *A Vision of Poets*.

133. Milton like a seraph strong. The original reading was "The deep-haired Milton like an angel tall". The change is a happy example of the improvements Tennyson has introduced in the final version of his poem : the former reading gave little idea of the qualities of Milton's genius ; the latter suggests "a power of sustained flight, of far-reaching vision, of lofty eloquence". The seraphim, according to the ancient Hebrew doctrine, were an order of angels who hovered round the throne of God on mighty wings, chanting His praises and bearing His messages to earth ; their chief attributes were power and wisdom. The cherubim were silent, mysterious spirits, and are generally pictured as not

of human shape—winged heads without bodies. Cf. Gray's well-known lines on Milton (*Progress of Poesy*, iii. 2. 1) :—

> "Nor second He, that rode sublime
> Upon the seraph-wings of Extasy".

134. Shakespeare bland and mild. These two epithets well denote the kindly and tolerant character of Shakespeare's genius, his broad sympathy with human nature, his freedom from cynical bitterness. Cf. "Our Shakespeare's bland and universal eye".—*Sonnet to Macready*, 13.

135. world-worn Dante. The sad life led by the great Florentine poet in his long exile left its impress on his features : portraits of him represent his face as marked with deep lines of care and thought. **grasp'd his song.** In the portrait of Dante by Giotto, at Florence, the poet holds a book under his arm.

137. the Ionian father. So Dryden calls Shakespeare "the Homer or father of our dramatic poets". Homer was probably an Asiatic Greek. He is thought to have been born in some Ionian city, probably either Smyrna or Chios. In busts and other likenesses of Homer he is generally represented as a very old man with a long beard and a wrinkled face. Pope (*The Temple of Fame*, 184, 185) thus pictures him :

> "Father of verse ! in holy fillets drest,
> His silver beard wav'd gently o'er his breast".

141. stately-set, majestically poised.

142. Many an arch high up did lift, was raised on high by lofty arches.

143. And angels etc. 'Jacob's ladder' was pictured on the ceiling. Cf. Bible, *Gen.* xxviii. 12, "And he (Jacob) dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it".

144. With interchange of gift, *i.e.*, carrying offerings of prayer and praise from man to God and bringing blessings down from heaven to earth.

145. mosaic. Mosaic work is composed of small pieces of coloured marble, glass etc., set so as to form a regular pattern or picture, and cemented together; from Gk. 'belonging to the Muses', hence 'artistic, ornamental'.

146. cycles of the human tale, representations of those sets or series of historical events that occur in the case of every nation as it develops.

148. So wrought, they will not fail. Understand *that*; "so wrought that they will not fail". Mosaic work is of a very permanent character. **fail**, decay, wear away.

149-160. The successive stages in the history of the French people from the middle of the eighteenth century might be well represented by this series of pictures. The grinding tyranny of taxation and the feudal exactions of the nobles under which the people patiently suffered during the *ancient regime*, were followed by the tigerlike ferocity of the Reign of Terror which began after the overthrow of the monarchy and the execution of Louis XVI. Next came the vigorous energy of the young Republic with its grand schemes for 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' and last, the failure and abandonment of these schemes; and the ready adoption of various political constitutions—empire, monarchy, republic—as cures for social and political anarchy.

151. a tiger. Cf. *Locksley Hall*, 135 :—

"Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion creeping nigher".

153. strong to break etc., strong enough to crush or to fetter in firm bonds the violence of despots.

155. like some sick man. So the Turkish Empire was called "the Sick Man of Europe" by the Czar Nicholas in 1853.

157. **over these she trod**. The struggles of mankind in its progress towards freedom were disregarded as beneath notice, except as material for ornamental art.

159. **Oriels**, literally, windows in recesses: from Low Lat. *oriolum*, for *aureolum*, 'ornamented with gold' recesses in large rooms often being profusely gilded. **colour'd flame** etc. The two faces were painted on the coloured glass forming the upper-most 'lights' of the two windows.

163. **Plato...Verulam**. Cf. *The Princess*, ii. 144-147 :—

> "The highest is the measure of the man,
> And not the Kaffir, Hottentot, Malay,
> Nor those horn-handed breakers of the glebe,
> But Homer, Plato, Verulam".

Francis Bacon was created Baron Verulam in 1618 and Viscount St. Albans in 1620. **large-brow'd**. The epithet is said to have been suggested by the bust of Bacon by Nollekens in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge.

164. **The first of those who know**, the two greatest of philosophers. The line is an adaptation of Dante's description of Aristotle, "Il maestro di color che sanno," the master of those who know. Cf. Church's *Life of Bacon*, Chap. viii. :—"Two men stand out 'the masters of those who know,' without equals up to their time among men—the Greek Aristotle and the Englishman Bacon. They agree in the universality and comprehensiveness of their conception of human knowledge : they were absolutely alone in their ambition to work out this conception".

165. **And all** etc., all those great thinkers who by their speculations and discoveries opened up new sources of knowledge and changed the course of human progress.

167. **slender shafts**, the thin stone columns forming the frame-work of the Gothic windows. **blazon'd**, portrayed : originally an heraldic term, meaning 'to paint with armorial bearings', from F. *blason*, a shield or coat of arms. Cf. *The Daisy*, 58, "The giant windows' blazon'd fires" ; and *In*

Memoriam, lxxxvii. 8, "The prophets blazon'd on the panes".

169. **Thro' which..Flush'd.** Cf. Keats, *St. Agnes' Eve*, 217-221 :—

"Full on this casement shone the winter moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;
Rose bloom fell on her hands, together prest
And on her hair a glory like a saint".

171. **as morn from Memnon.** The colossal statue near Thebes in Egypt when first struck by the rays of the rising sun was said to emit a sound like the twanging of a chord. The statue was really one of Amenophis, an Egyptian king, but the Greeks called it Memnon, a legendary hero of the Trojan war, son of Eos, goddess of the Dawn. Allusions to the music of Memnon are frequent in the poets: cf. Akenside, *Pleasures of the Imagination* :—

..."Old Memnon's image, long renowned
By fabling Nilus ; to the quivering touch
Of Titan's ray, with each repulsive string
Consenting, sounded thro' the warbling air
Unbidden strains".

172. **Rivers of melodies.** Cf. *Œnone*, 64, "full-flowing river of speech", and note.

174. **her low preamble,** the soft prelude to her song. It is really the male bird that sings, but the poet here and in *The Princess*, i. 218 (with Milton, *Par. Lost*, iv. 603, etc.) follows the old myth which tells that one of the daughters of Pandion (either Procne or Philomela) was changed into a nightingale. But cf. *The Gardener's Daughter*, 93, 94 :—

"The nightingale
Sang loud, as tho' he were the bird of day".

176. **Throb thro' the ribbed stone,** pulsate or echo along the vaulted roof, whose arches and mouldings were curved like ribs.

177. **feastful,** festive—a Miltonic word : see his *Sonn.* iv. 12, "feastful friends", and *Sam. Agon.* 1741, "feastful days" ; it is also found in Spenser.

179. **Lord over Nature** etc. The Soul is represented as having full mastery over all Science and all the secrets of the Universe and complete possession of the avenues by which knowledge reaches the perception.

183. **'Tis one to me,** it is all the same to me, I am indifferent to it. **young night divine.** The epithet 'divine' is frequently applied to night by Homer in consideration, perhaps, of its reviving influence. **young,** fresh.

184. **Crown'd** etc. Cf. *Maud*, xliv. iv, "Yon fair stars that crown a happy day".

185. **Making sweet close** etc., bringing to a pleasant conclusion the delightfull occupations of the day.

186. **Lit light** etc. Cf. Milton, *Par. Lost*, i. 726 :—

> "from the arched roof
> Pendent by subtle magic many a row
> Of starry lamps and blazing cressets fed
> With naphtha and asphaltus yielded light
> As from a sky".

in wreaths and anadems, in lamps arranged in clusters and festoons : *anadem* is from Gk. a head-band, to bind around.

187. **quintessences,** purest extracts. The 'fifth essence', *quinta essentia*, was added by Aristotle to the four material elements, earth, air, fire, water ; Milton, *Par. Lost*, iii. 716, calls it "this ethereal quintessence of heaven" : Cf. *Recollections of the Arabian Nights*, 122, 123 :—

> "The fourscore windows all alight
> As with the quintessence of flame".

188. hollow'd moons of gems, transparent gems, hollowed out so as to contain the oil, and shaped like the moon.

189. To mimic heaven. The palace is completed by an artificial imitation of the star-lit sky, so that it may be within itself a treasure-house of all forms of beauty to be found in the Universe.

190. 'I marvel etc. I wonder whether my passive enjoyment of beauty is capable of further addition or extension.

192. flatter'd to the height, encouraged to expand itself to the utmost degree.

193. My various eyes, my different moods of contemplation.

196. My Gods etc. The only gods recognised are of the human species, and the Soul regards itself as their compeer : the worship of such gods is but reflected self-worship.

197. God-like isolation. Cf. Aristotle's saying (quoted by Bacon, *Essays*, *Of Friendship*), "Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a God". The Epicurean notion of the Gods as living aloof from mankind in heedless isolation is given in *The Lotos-Eaters*, **155-164.**

199. What time I watch etc. From the proud height on which she has placed herself the Soul looks down with scorn and loathing on the world around. **darkening**, which seem like a stain or blur on the landscape.

201. In filthy sloughs etc. The ordinary life and natural joys of mankind are regarded as mere animal grossness, not superior to that of swine wallowing in the mire. *Slough* is from a root *slug*, seen in the Ger. *schlucken*, to swallow, and means 'a hollow place full of mire,' such as would swallow up anything thrown into it. The other

slough, meaning 'the cast-off skin of a snake,' may be traced to the same root. **prurient**, literally 'itching'.

203. And oft etc., and often in frenzied folly they seek their own ruin. Cf. Bible, *Mark*, v. 13, "And the unclean spirit went out and entered into the swine, and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea (they were about two thousand) and were choked in the sea".

205. Then of etc. The Soul fondly talks of the higher instincts and of the desire for a life beyond the grave (which are the common property of all mankind) as if they were a peculiar possession of her own, which had come to her by the same natural process of evolution that had raised her to the supreme height of refinement above the common herd. **prate**, talk with foolish self-conceit.

209. I take possession etc., I claim as my own the results of all human progress.

210. I care not etc. The climax of the Soul's self-glorification is reached when she declares herself emancipated from the need of any form of religious belief, and recognising only her innate ideas of right, looks down from a serene height of contemplation upon the different creeds of mankind, regarding them as only jarring dogmatisms. **Cf.** *In Memoriam*, xxxiii. 1-4 :—

"O thou, that after toil and storm
Mayst seem to have reach'd a purer air,
Whose faith has centre everywhere,
Nor cares to fix itself to form."

213. the riddle of the painful earth, the unexplained problem of life on this sorrowful earth. Tennyson again uses the phrase "the riddle of the earth" in *The Two Voices*, 170 : cf. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ii. 4 :—"The universe was as a mighty sphinx-riddle". The "still sad music of humanity" suddenly rises to the ears of the Soul, and fitfully reminds her of her toiling and suffering fellow-men.

219. Like Herod etc. Cf. Bible, *Acts*, xii. 21-23 :— "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost".

220. Pangs of hell, stinging remorse and despair.

223. The abysmal deeps of Personality, the hidden secrets of each man's nature, his qualities and faculties which are buried far below the surface. Cf. Arthur Hallam's Essay, *Theodicæa Novissima* : "I believe that redemption is universal in so far as is left no obstacle between man and God but man's own will ; that indeed is in the power of God's election, with whom alone rest the abysmal secrets of personality". The sympathies and emotions of the heart still exist in the innermost depths of the Soul, although they have been put out of sight and use.

225. When she would think etc., when she wished to resume her pensive contemplation, the mysterious power intervened, and threw her mental faculties into confusion. The allusion is to the vision at Belshazzar's feast (Bible, *Daniel*, v.) of the fingers of a man's hands that "wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace ... And this is the writing that was written, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. This is the interpretation of the thing : Mene ; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Tekel : Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Peres ; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians".

229. Deep dread etc. The Soul is suddenly struck with the knowledge that she is *alone*, and that her life, passed in unsympathetic isolation from the struggles and toils of humanity, is but a hateful solitude, a living death. But she cannot easily give up her belief in the selfish worship of

Beauty : she first scorns her own weakness ; then, recovering her self-conceit, she retracts her scorn of herself with a cynical sneer at her change of mood. Cf. Wordsworth, *Peele Castle*, st. 14.

235. **Whereof the strong** etc., whose foundations have always, since I first began to remember, seemed immoveable.

237-244. The shows of Beauty with which the Soul has hitherto satisfied her gaze give place to ghastly images of decay and corruption and spectres of horror.

241. **And hollow shades** etc. Cf. Beckford's description of the lost souls wandering in the Hall of Eblis, in the last chapter of *Vathek* : "Soliman raised his hands towards heaven in token of supplication, and the Caliph discerned through his bosom, which was as transparent as crystal, his heart enveloped in flames".

242. **fretted,** eaten by worms. The O. E. *fretan* is a contraction of *foretan*, from *for*-, intensive prefix, and *etan*, to eat.

243. **three-months-old,** that had been dead for three months.

247. **'Mid onward-sloping motions** etc. The Soul becomes aware that in her isolation she has cut herself off from participation in the universal life and progress of mankind. The sudden perception of the never-ending advance of the human race from lower to higher conditions, its approach to the

> . . . "one far off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves,"

startles the Soul into a knowledge that she alone is left in stagnation without change or progress. **onward-sloping,** gradually advancing.

249. A still salt pool etc. Understand "she seemed".

252. moon-led waters white. Cf. *Maud*, i. xiv. 17, "as white As ocean-foam in the moon ; " *moon-led*=tidal.

253. choral starry dance. Cf. Milton, *Par. Lost*, v. 177, 178 :—

"And ye five other wandering fires that move
In mystic dance not without song".

The regular motions of the planets are often represented under the metaphors of rhythmical song and dance. The Pythagoreans were the first to call these symmetrical movements a 'dance'. They also believed that the revolutions of the heavenly bodies produced loud harmonious sounds—the "music of the spheres".

255. Circumstance, the surrounding sphere of the Heavens. The Ptolemaic Astronomy represents the universe as "an enormous azure round of space scooped or carved out of Chaos, and communicating aloft with the Empyrean, but consisting within itself of ten Orbs or hollow Spheres in succession, wheeling one within the other, down to the stationary nest of our small Earth at the centre, with the elements of water, air and fire that are immediately around it" (Masson, *Introd. to Milton's Pœtical Works*).

256. Roll'd round by one fix'd law. For illustrations of Tennyson's recognition of the movement of Law throughout the universe.

257. Back on herself etc., her pride in her isolation was turned into stinging remorse. Cf. *The Last Tournament*, 450 :—

"the scorpion-worm that twists in hell
And stings itself to everlasting death".

It was a belief of the old naturalists that a scorpion if enclosed within a ring of flame from which it could not

escape would turn its sting upon itself: it thus became an emblem of the stingings of conscience.

261. She, mouldering etc. Cf. *In Memoriam*, xi 19, 20:—

> "And dead calm in that noble breast
> Which *heaves* but with the *heaving* deep".

And *The Lotos-Eaters*, 95: "*climbing* up the *climbing* wave". Also *St. Agnes' Eve*, 7: "*creeping* with the *creeping* hours," and *In the Valley of Cauteretz*, 2: "*Deepening* thy voice with *deepening* of the night".

262. tenfold, utterly. Cf. *Sir Galahad*, 3, and note.

263. exiled, the last syllable is accented, *exiled.*

264. Lost to her place and name, leaving her proper sphere empty and her life's duties unfulfilled. Cf. *Merlin and Vivien, ad fin.*, "lost to life and use and name and fame".

266. for her despair, because of the despair she felt.

267. dreadful time, dreadful eternity, a life of misery in this world and the next.

273. girt round etc., surrounded by impenetrable darkness. Cf. *Enoch Arden*, 488, "compass'd round by the blind wall of night".

275. Far off etc. After a period of agonizing doubt and despair, the Soul's sympathies slowly awake and she becomes vaguely conscious of the human world outside her isolated palace. **dully**. Tennyson has "stilly sound" (*Recollections of the Arabian Nights*, 103), and "shrilly whinnyings" (*Demeter and Persephone*, 44):

282. one deep cry, the united roar.

283. **'I have found** etc. The Soul at first is filled with despair at her inability to enter into the new sphere of action which she has discovered in the world : she does not see how she is to exercise the kindly emotions so long left in disuse, and thus become "one with her kind".

285. **'I am on fire within.** A burning sense of remorse consumes the heart, for which the Soul despairs of a remedy.

286. **no murmur**, not even the faintest sound.

289. **So when** etc. After a year of despair the Soul sees that it is only by abandoning her proud elevation above her fellows that she can preserve herself from ruin. She descends from her "intellectual throne," abandons her "high palace," and endeavours in humility and in the duties of common life to learn the lesson of love.

293. **Yet pull not down** etc. But refinement need not be exclusive, and the culture of the intellect does not necessarily imply a deadening of the natural sympathies. If the beauties of the palace are not reserved for selfish contemplation, but are shared "with others," the Soul may well inhabit it once more, and lead therein a perfect life.

294. **lightly**, gracefully.

کتابخانہ / محمد ہارون سوئی